THE WONDERFUL WISHES OF JACKY & JEAN

MARY A. DICKERSON

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Eating cream waffles from one hand and holding big rolls stuffed with hot little wiener-wurst sausages in the other.

(*See page 51*)

The Wonderful Wishes of Jacky and Jean

By

Mary A. Dickerson

With Six Illustrations by C. B. Falls

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Dedication

To those who have helped me most,
My Uncle and Aunt
REV. AND MRS. FRANCIS MASON HALL.

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The next moment found herself sitting flat on the boards, gazing into the eyes of the most astonishing person she had ever seen 40

She was floating lazily, just under the crest of a big green wave 58

They were flying over a beautiful stretch of country 108

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CHAPTER I

The Mysterious Sparrow

"REALLY," said the sparrow, "I think it would be to your advantage to let me go."

Jacky dropped the plump little body in his astonishment, and the bird fluttered to the window sill and blinked up at him with its bright, dark eyes.

"What's the matter?" asked Jean, who had just come in with a battered bird cage, rescued from the cobwebby garret, where it had lain for years. "You looked scared. Fraid cat! It's only a sparrow."

"But—but—he spoke to me," said Jacky, backing discreetly away.

"Nonsense!" And Jean, the practical, set the cage down and

went carefully toward the little bird, her hands softly spread to catch him.

But he fluttered just beyond her reach, shook his head at her and held up one small claw reprovingly as he said, "Not nonsense at all, my dear. I don't see why a sparrow shouldn't talk if he pleases. Do you?"

Jean sat down hard on the floor and Jacky giggled. It was fun to see Jean, who did not believe in fairies at all, and even scoffed at the giant Uncle Tom had showed them at the circus, looking so astonished.

To tell the truth, she was more scared than Jacky.

Jacky believed in all sorts of fairy stories with his whole heart, and would not have been astonished if his oatmeal had wished him "good morning," or the brass knobs on his bed had nodded a "good night." He had always known that birds and beasts could speak if they pleased, and had been more surprised than frightened when the sparrow spoke. He was joyful now. But Jean—well, father said he was afraid Jean would grow into a strong minded woman. She didn't believe in anything that was not ordinary and every-day, and she was never, never afraid in the dark.

It pleased Jacky to think that for once he could be more at his ease than she. So he made a very fine bow, just as his dancing school

teacher had taught him, and said: "I beg your pardon, Mr. Sparrow. Don't mind Jean. She's silly, and doesn't believe in things, you know, but she means to be nice."

"I know, I know," said the sparrow wisely. "I've been watching Jean for some time, and I'm very sorry for her. In fact, that is the reason I allowed myself to be caught. It's very sad indeed when little girls don't like fairy stories."

"But," cried Jean, who had found her tongue at last, "they aren't true—you know they aren't, and——"

"Humph," replied the sparrow, very crustily indeed. "I suppose you think I'm not real!" And he turned his back on her and demanded that the window be opened. "People who don't believe in things they hear about are bad enough," he sputtered. "But people who won't even believe what they see and hear themselves are not to be borne. I'm going away."

But when he turned his back on Jean he made an unlucky move. She was quite over her astonishment now and with one pounce she had caught him again. Before he could so much as twiddle his toe, she had him tight and fast in the old bird cage.

"Now, then," she said decidedly, as she sat down and rested her chin on her hands. "Now, then, if you're a really, truly fairy get out of that cage."

The sparrow sputtered with wrath. "See here," he exclaimed, "this isn't fair. As it happens, I'm caught. It's my own fault if I turned myself into a sparrow, you know, and if I'm foolish enough to get caught while I'm visible to human eyes, I've got to take the consequences. I can't even turn myself back into a fairy while I'm behind these bars. Let me out."

Jacky's hand went toward the door, but Jean caught and held it. "In the story books," she said gravely, "the genii and fairies and things always reward the people who get them out of scrapes. Now, what I want to know is, what are you going to do for us?"

The sparrow forgot how angry he was and laughed till he nearly fell off his perch.

"Frizzle my feathers!" he exclaimed naughtily, "but you're a sharp child. You're modern, all right enough. No wonder the children of this generation are so hard to deal with."

Then he grew sober again, and sat blinking at her with such a wise look, that Jean rubbed her eyes. It almost seemed that he could not be a saucy sparrow. She thought he must have turned into an owl.

"Well," he said at last, "I'll reward your brother for his belief in me, and you for your cleverness. What do you want?"

Jean turned to Jacky. After all, when it came to dealings with fairies he was the one who knew the most, and though she took the

lead in nearly everything, she said rather helplessly, "You say, Jacky —what do we want?"

Jacky swelled with importance, and his forehead tied itself up into a perfect knot of funny little wrinkles.

"Regulation three wishes, I suppose?" said the sparrow. But Jacky shook his head. Though not as practical as Jean, he had an idea of making a good trade, too.

"No," he said slowly, "I've thought of something lots better. I've been reading about genii, you know, and they always come when people rub things—lamps or rings generally—and the people who saved them keep on getting wishes right along. They don't have to do all their wishing at once. Now, I'd like that. Can't we call you whenever we please?"

The sparrow gave a rather exasperating little laugh.

"You're driving a pretty shrewd bargain," he said sharply, "but—what could you rub? I certainly haven't any old pots or lamps or rings hanging about, and I don't see many here."

Jacky and Jean looked blank a moment. Then Jacky had an idea.

"The cage!" he exclaimed. "That's it. Whenever we rub that cage, why you come and give us what we want. That's the way to fix it."

"Oh, indeed!" and the sparrow laughed rather sarcastically.

But Jean was holding fast to Jacky, so he could not open the cage before the bargain was made, and he saw no other way out of his trouble.

"Very well," he said, "there's one thing at least; I'll have made Jean know that it's possible to be too practical. She'll have to believe in fairy tales by the time she gets through with me. What's your first wish? Tell it, and let's have things over. I've an engagement with my tailor down Spiderweb lane in half an hour. What can I do for you?"

Jacky and Jean put their heads together.

"It's too late to wish ourselves anywhere tonight," said Jacky, wistfully. "Dinner'll be ready soon, and I'm tired. Let's wish for father to have us down to dessert, give us lots of ice cream and a dime apiece. How's that?"

Jean nodded. She would have liked a wish a little more out of the ordinary, just to prove what the sparrow could do; but she felt that there were plenty of times coming. "All right," she said, and the wish was repeated to their prisoner.

"That sounds to me like three wishes in one," he said. "But it's all right. Now, then, open the door and shut your eyes."

"Oh, but we want to see you when you're not a sparrow," wailed Jacky. "We want to see your wings and your——"

The sparrow interrupted him. "You don't know that I'm a fairy at all," he said sharply. "I may be a wicked genii, or an ogre, or a haunted giant. You can't tell. And I shan't let you know. Whatever I am really, I'll be nothing but a sparrow to you. Shut your eyes tight, or I'll order bread pudding for your dinner instead of ice cream, send your father to his club, and see that he doesn't give you a cent from the day before the day after yesterday. Quick!"

Jacky shot out his arm, pulled open the door of the cage and clapped one hand over his eyes and one over Jean's.

There was a flutter, a twitter, a laugh that was rather loud, and then silence. They peeped through their fingers and the cage was empty.

CHAPTER II

The End of the First Wish and the Beginning of the Second

JACKY and Jean lived in the top of a very big house near the city. Their nursery was pretty and bright, with Mother Goose pictures chasing each other all around the wall, big, low window seats and a long bookcase filled with all sorts of books, from those they had had when they were very small babies two and three years old, to those that were appropriate now, when they were eight and nine.

But it was lonesome up there, nevertheless; for, you see, mother was away. She had had to go south, because she was not strong, and the doctor had said she could not take the children, for she must have no noise or worry at all. And grandma had gone with her, and father

—well, father was very busy. He came up every evening before his dinner time and talked to them a little, and if he had no company he would send for them to come down when he had his dessert, and they always liked that. But generally they were alone all day with Rachel. Rachel was Zillah's sister, and Zillah was the cook. She had been with mother ever since mother was married, but Rachel did not come till Jacky did, and that fact always made it hard for him to understand why she was any older. Then there was Maryan-Martha. Not Mary Ann Martha, but Mary "and" Martha. Zillah, who was the girl's mother, always explained that she and her husband could not agree which name it should be, and so she was christened with both, and nobody ever thought of shortening them, except to leave out the "d" at the end of "and."

MaryanMartha was very young, if you looked at her with Zillah's eyes, or even Rachel's. If you looked at her as Jacky and Jean saw her, she was like other grown folks, and very tall, and very black. She waited on table and pretended not to notice when Jacky or Jean spilled things on the cloth, or took more cake than they were told they might. For which things they deeply loved her.

And then, what games she could play! Rachel was too dignified to play games, though she could tell good stories. The only trouble was that Jacky and Jean did not agree as to the kind of stories.

Jacky preferred tales of fairies and giants, elves, pixies, ghosts—anything and everything that was calculated to make his thick yellow hair stand on end with fright when he got between the sheets at night. While Jean, as practical as her two tight little pale-brown braids, said such stories were bosh, and wanted to know what Rachel and Zillah did "down south" when they were two little pickaninnies, and helped look after mother, who was just a little baby then, and did the most interesting things.

It was Rachel who let them know that the first wish granted them by the Mysterious Sparrow had come true. For she came upstairs very cross, and said she had made a peach pie for dessert, and it had burned, and Zillah was having to order ice cream over the telephone. "An' your pa comin' home after all, though he said this noon he couldn't," she went on, while the children wriggled with delight.

"I told you so," whispered Jacky to Jean, who had had a fit of non-belief after the disappearance of the sparrow.

"My!" and Jean's eyes grew big and round, like brown saucers. "Just think how hard we'll have to imagine something to ask next time. I can't think of anything in particular, can you?"

"In fairy stories they always wish for money," said Jacky, the wise, "but father's got plenty. I guess that's what's the matter with us.

I heard Miss Higgenbotham tell mother we'd be happier if we were poor. We might wish to be poor, just for a change."

"Yes," said Jean excitedly. "I've always just longed to sweep off the front steps with a little, red-handled broom, the way the little girl in the next street does — you know, we can just see the house through Rachel's window. But Rachel gets angry if I even try to watch her do it, let alone doing it myself. I think it would be fun to wish for things like that. They're what Uncle Tom calls adventures, aren't they?"

"I guess so," answered Jacky, as Rachel descended upon him, and bore him off to get on a clean suit and a particularly broad stiff collar and a bow that tickled his chin. "Anyhow, we'll wish for adventures, and we'll be bound to get something."

"Whatever are you talking about?" said Rachel. "You chillun are de greatest! You-all's even wuss den yo' ma." And after she had sent them down stairs, neat and clean and trim, she shook her head over their queer ways, and wished she had them down south where their mother was little, so they could be natural, healthy children.

Meantime the children were having a fine time down stairs. Father was full of fun, and joked with them while they ate their ice cream, and he hid their dimes in the funniest places, and made them hunt them out. Two or three times Jacky came near telling him

about their wonderful visitor of the afternoon, but he was a little bit shy. He was afraid his father would laugh at him. As for Jean, it never entered her head to tell. She was still an unbeliever, and would have felt as if she was telling stories outright, to say anything about the matter till it seemed much more certain than it did now, although the ice cream, still sliding down her pink throat in smooth, cool mouthfuls, and the dime making a round red spot in her tightly clenched little fist, seemed proof enough that it was all true.

They were so tired when they went up to bed that they did not talk much about their wishes, but in the morning both heads popped up at the same minute, and instead of the usual "good morning" that went from one white bed to the other, both cried, "What shall we wish?" and when they tumbled out of bed and into their clothes, Jean was quite as excited as Jacky.

The first thing was to get rid of Rachel. Naturally, they couldn't go wishing around, rubbing bird cages and receiving visits from talkative sparrows, when she was anywhere near. But it was housecleaning time and Rachel was only too glad of their promise to take care of themselves, while she went to help and to superintend the work of Mrs. George Washington Cæsar Tompkins, who had been hired for the occasion.

No sooner was she out of sight than Jean ran to the window seat where they had hidden the cage, and brought it out.

"Let's both rub, Jacky," she said. "Yes, and shut our eyes," answered Jacky. "You know, he didn't like to have us see him go, and very likely he'd feel a little delicate about appearing if we looked."

"Humph! I don't see why he should," said Jean, but nevertheless she shut her eyes so tight they were quite lost in a nest of tiny wrinkles, and both rubbed hard at the bars of the battered cage.

Not a sound did they hear. Nothing seemed to happen.

"There," cried Jean, with a disappointed note in her voice, though she tried to seem triumphant, "I told you it was all a mistake or a dream, or something. I knew there weren't any fairies or ogres or giants—especially haunted ones. I knew it wasn't——" But as her eyes got well open she stopped. For, sitting on the perch of the cage, half asleep, and much rumpled as to feathers, sat a round little sparrow.

"Hush," cried Jacky, "don't talk so or he'll go away. Oh, Jean, how could you?" For the sparrow was paying not the slightest attention to them.

"I didn't mean it," said Jean apologetically. "Indeed, I didn't, Mr. Sparrow. Please forgive me—and talk. Oh, do please talk!"

The sparrow gave a low little laugh. "I thought I'd taught you

better," he said. "Didn't everything come out as per order last evening? Yes? I thought so. What do you want today? Diamonds, I suppose, and money, ponies and all sorts of things like that."

"No," said Jean stoutly, "we don't. Mother has diamonds, and we each have a pony. We want to wish for adventures."

The sparrow stopped looking sleepy, and sat up very straight. "Well, well," he said with an approving nod, "you are original, clever children. What do you want to do first?"

"Be pirates," said Jacky.

"Be poor," said Jean.

The sparrow laughed till he fell off the perch, and had to pick himself up and straighten his feathers.

"Try again," he said. "You both spoke at once, and asked different things. If one had wished first, or both had wished the same thing —but try again. Plenty of time. I don't mind these feathers. They're quite cozy," and he settled down for a sun bath, while Jacky and Jean fell to squabbling over their wish, which was of course very naughty, and very thoughtless, too. They should have had their minds all made up before they rubbed the cage.

"Oh, dear!" cried Jean finally, in a temper, "I wish you were just like that bolster over there. Then I could have my own way. I wish——" but as she spoke things turned dark around them a mo-

ment. "Only one wish at a time, if you please, madam," said a very firm voice. And as Jean realized what that wish had been she rushed toward the little gilt cage trying to close the door, and crying at the top of her voice, "No, no. Oh, please! I didn't mean that wish — I didn't mean it at all."

But it was too late. The cage was empty, and the sunlight was already beginning to fill every corner of the room.

The second wish had begun.

CHAPTER III

A Wish That Got Twisted

NATURALLY, the first thing that Jean did was to look about the room for her brother. But he was nowhere to be seen. "Jacky," she called, "Jacky, Jacky, where are you?"

"You ought to know," said a funny, muffled voice at her feet, and starting forward, Jean stumbled over a big white bolster lying directly before her.

"Oh, Jacky!" she gasped, "did it really happen?"

"Of course it did," said Jacky, ruefully, as he tried to sit up. "Mercy, Jean, why didn't you think? I wish you had to have your mouth full of feathers. It's horrid. And my feet—why good gracious, I haven't got any feet."

"Of course you have not," said practical Jean. "Didn't you hear

me wish you into a bolster? And did you ever see a bolster with legs? I wish Rachel didn't use those old-fashioned things, and hadn't hers in here to air. Then I'd never have thought of such a thing."

"But you might have said pillow," said Jacky fretfully, "and that'd be just as bad. Worse! I'd be squarer. But say, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Rachel will——"

But the bolster became suddenly agitated. "Rachel mustn't know a thing about it," cried the funny voice, that was so strange, and yet so like Jacky's after all. "Why, Rachel would take away the cage, and say we were silly, and we'd never have a chance for any other wish, ever. We've got to run away, run away for all day. Fairy wishes always stop when the sun sets. If you'd read properly you'd know. And Rachel mustn't see me till sunset. We must run away."

"Run away? When you haven't any legs?" and in spite of her sorrow for what she had done to her brother, Jean giggled.

"That's so," said Jacky. "I forgot. You see I can see all right and talk. I've just got this bolster thing all around me somehow. But I can't be very heavy. Try and carry me."

Jean leaned down, got her arms around him, and sure enough he came up quite easily. But what was stranger still, no sooner was he properly on end than a pair of queer thin little legs began to sprout at

the two lower corners of the white bolster cover, and in a moment he was quite able to go alone.

But his looks! Jean lay back on the bed and laughed at him till her sides ached, and Jacky, almost crying, reminded her that it was all her fault, anyway. Just then they heard Rachel coming, and with a frantic leap Jacky landed on the bed.

"My sakes!" said Rachel, "I thought I done took that bolster in my room once. I surtinly thought so." And she made a sweep at poor Jacky, caught him up and pummeled him smartly as she carried him across the hall and dropped him on to her bed. "You be all right, honey?" she called back, and Jean said, "Yes," glad that Rachel had not asked as to the whereabouts of her brother.

As soon as Rachel was fairly out of sight she got the real bolster and pulled Jacky out from under the pile of pillows on Rachel's bed. Then they began to lay their plans. Jacky insisted that they must go out of doors. "I know it isn't very warm yet," he said, "but if you knew how it felt to be feathers I guess you'd say yes fast enough."

"But," said Jean, "we can't go away for all day like that. They'll miss us. And, besides, where would we get any luncheon?"

"They can miss all they want to. I don't care—till night. And if you can't steal things to eat, you're not much good. You get Toddles and come along. I've got the hard part. Just imagine getting

down stairs with legs like this!" and he gazed ruefully at the weak, sticklike articles at his lower corners.

Jean giggled. "Yes," she said, "and then if Rachel or Mrs. George Washington Cæsar Tompkins finds you they'll thump you hard and take you back." But she really was sorry for Jacky, and hurried down stairs to get Toddles and see about lunch.

Toddles was their dog. He was a skye terrier, with very bright eyes, almost hidden under long, silky hair that hung in fringes from his legs and back and head, and made him look like a mop, and gave him, sometimes, the funny little walk that had suggested his name.

Toddles was not allowed in the nursery till after breakfast, and had to be sent out to Jasper, the coachman, at five, so he had not been present at any of the interviews with the mysterious sparrow. He had always slept in the nursery till he began to amuse himself worrying the sofa cushions, and tearing the sheets and pillow cases with his bright, sharp teeth, when he thought it was time for Jacky and Jean to get up in the morning. Then, as neither scoldings nor whippings seemed to do any good, he was banished. Jean found him on the porch, quivering all over his little body with impatience, and giving eager "yaps" at the closed door. In a moment he was scurrying along before her, and she had to scold him and send him up stairs before

she dared try the pantry. Toddles, with his barking and his wiggling, would be certain to betray her.

It was rather dangerous getting into the pantry. MaryanMartha had not finished her morning's work, and was clearing all the things off the big sideboard. The task seemed endless, so Jean marched boldly through with the request for a cooky, and, though Maryan-Martha knew very well that it was too early for extra cookies, she showed her white teeth, nodded, smiled, and in another second the swing doors snapped behind Jean's pigtails, and she was standing before the big refrigerator. Joy of joys! Just inside were three bottles of milk. On top was a basket, and in the basket some things that had come from the grocery. In a jiffy Jean had them out, and had stowed away in their place a bottle of milk, a whole dozen of bananas, unlimited cookies, and two stray rolls from the top of the bread box. Then out through the side door she went, hid the basket under a clump of lilacs, and slid back as she had gone. For she still had to help poor Jacky.

It was time, for as she went she heard agonized howls from Toddles, and arrived on the stairway in time to see a very much frightened little dog, with what tail he owned quite out of sight, coming scuttling down the stairs, while behind him rolled and bounded a big bolster. "Stop, stop!" cried Jean in wild dismay. "Stop, Jacky!

You make such a noise Rachel will hear you, and you'll scare Toddles into fits, and you'll get all hurt up."

But it wasn't till he reached the landing that Jacky could roll to safety. Then he sat up and felt to see if his legs were still stuck on the corners.

"Noise!" he said disdainfully. "It was Toddles making all the noise. Feathers don't rattle, silly! And there's one good thing about them, they don't hurt much when they hit, either. I had to tumble. I can't walk down those big stairs. Really, you don't know how high they are, Jean. Do get Toddles. He's scared to death. And hold him while I roll the rest of the way. Stand from under." And with a soft, bulgy lurch, Jacky threw himself on his side once more, gave a kick against the wall with his legs and went plumping on down the stairs. It was rather strange, to say the least, and Jean didn't wonder Toddles was scared, though she talked to him, and explained to him that it was really Jacky. And when he heard Jacky's voice and sniffed a little at the queer legs Toddles decided not to howl, anyway, though he still declined to go very near to the strange white bundle, that began throwing itself down the stairs, accompanied at every bounce by smothered screams from Jean, who could not understand why it didn't hurt to fall, even if you were a bulgy bolster.

At last the trouble was over, and with a last gasp Jacky bounced

heavily out the side door and lay panting on the grass, every separate little feather in his insides seeming to quiver by itself.

"Hurry!" whispered Jean in a frightened voice. "Just imagine if Rachel should see us—or rather, see you. And you do look so awfully white against that green grass."

The children knew exactly where they were going—the only place, in fact, where they would be at all safe. The house next door was vacant. In its garden was a little house that had once been used as an office by a doctor who had lived there. It was a pretty little place, with two small rooms and a big porch, but it was badly out of repair. The children had found one day, when they had escaped from Rachel, that not only could they open the shutters on the window that faced into the garden, away from their own home, but also the window itself. They had crawled in once, and had had a great time poking in the dusty cupboards, and trying the old chairs, and the broad couch, where so many of the doctor's patients had lain. They knew no one would think of looking there, and went hurrying along, Jean carrying the heavy basket, while Toddles barked before her, and Jacky dodged as well as he was able from bush to bush.

They reached the place safely, though Mrs. George Washington Cæsar Tompkins did confide to her husband that night that the Kendall home was haunted by the most peculiar ghost she had ever heard

of, because it walked in the daytime—she had seen it behind the lilac bushes.

At the little, old office, Jean waited till Jacky could help her with the window.

"But I can't," he wailed, as he flopped in a heap below it. "I can't raise my arms at all. Wait till you're all stuffed up with feathers. But say, you can stand on me, and that'll make you tall enough. It won't hurt. Can't you remember I'm feathers?" And he rolled into a heap, while Jean clambered gingerly up, frightened every second, as she felt her heavy little shoes sink into Jacky's softness.

But up went the window and in went Jean, only to come out again, to throw in Toddles and the basket, and then, with many shoves and pushes, the bulky form of Jacky, whose white case was already green in some places and black in others. He caught on a nail and tore the ticking that inclosed his feathers, and it hurt dreadfully. But somehow things didn't seem so bad when feathers instead of blood came from the scratch, until Jean made matters worse by trying to fix him up with a pin.

"As though it was fun to have any sort of skin stuck into," said Jacky, when at last he was all whole again, and the only trace of his mishap could be seen in the down feathers that floated through the air, chased energetically by Toddles.

Then began a very long and dreary day for the children. At first Jean was the brave one, and comforted Jacky, and let him have more than his share of bananas and cookies. But after a while, when she could hear Rachel calling, and saw MaryanMartha run by looking so frightened and sorry, Jean broke down, and Jacky told her fairy stories, while she quite forbore to say "Bosh" even at the most impossible things. How could she say bosh when she was suffering from a fairy story herself?

Toddles was a great nuisance, too. He would bark, and Jean made his small black nose sore by holding it when searchers were too near them.

"We'd better have left him home," said Jacky, crossly, after one sharp yelp that they were sure would betray them.

"Yes, and have him find us first thing," answered Jean. "He can smell us out anywhere, and you know it. What I'm worried about is Rachel and the others. Wonder if they've telephoned to father? We've been mighty naughty, Jacky." And then there was silence in the little office till Jean, looking up from an old magazine she had found, saw that Jacky was sound asleep, and Toddles was snoring beside him.

"Guess I will, too," said Jean softly, "and I'll use Jacky as he was meant to be used. What's the use of having a brother who's a bolster

if you don't use him?" and in a moment Jean was asleep, her smooth brown head resting easily on Jacky's plump white sides.

She woke with a start. It was dark in the little room, and a voice was exclaiming: "Here, you, get off my stomach. How do you suppose a person's going to breathe that way?" and her head rest suddenly seemed strange and scratchy, and very energetic.

"Why, Jacky," she cried; "Jacky, what's the matter?"

"Nothin's the matter, now. Matter's all over. Sun's down, and I'm back! Jinks, but it's good to get out of those feathers. Come, let's get out of here."

"Oh, dear," sighed Jean. "You've changed. I wish I'd kept awake to see how you did it. I meant to. Did—did you see anything, Jacky?"

"Not a thing. Just felt kind of light and funny a minute, and then a lot of pricks, as if they'd pushed the feathers in instead of out, and then—why, there I was as good as new."

"And now we'd better go home. I'm very sorry for father," said Jean, and they hastily climbed out of the window and went scurrying across the lawn.

CHAPTER IV

What Jacky Wished

THE next morning Jacky and Jean were not quite so eager to get at the bird cage. For one thing they had had a great many explanations to make the evening before—explanations which their father and Rachel had not seemed to understand at all.

Though father had not punished them and they were pretty sure he had been almost crying when they came tumbling into the study, where Rachel was trying to explain to a couple of policemen when and where she had seen the children last, still they knew that another disappearance would be dangerous, at least.

"We'll have to arrange with the sparrow," said Jacky, who had absolute faith in his fairy. "He can fix some way. Get dummies in our places, or make Rachel forget she hasn't seen me, or something

like that. He'll fix it." And Jacky departed to his breakfast, feeling very happy. It's a great relief to be a boy, after you've tried being a bolster.

When at last they got out the battered bird cage they handled it very gingerly, and Jacky insisted that it be set all by itself on the edge of the window seat, while they both went ten steps away, and stayed there.

"I'm not going to have any more accidents," he said, "and I tell you what, Jean, it's my turn wishing."

"But I didn't mean——" began Jean.

"I know you didn't, Jean, but just the same you did, you know. And it was me had to be the bolster. I think it's my turn, of course."

"What are you going to wish?" she asked, after Jacky had sat all screwed up in a bunch for fully five minutes, with his eyes on the bird cage.

"To be a pirate," said Jacky so suddenly that Jean jumped. Then he walked over and rubbed the cage. Rubbed it hard. There wasn't a bit of mystery this time. There was no darkness at all. They didn't have time even to shut their eyes, when presto, there was the sparrow, not in the cage this time, but tiptoeing on the window sill, and saying good morning in the cheeriest way.

"Rather a joke on you yesterday, wasn't it?" he said with a wink

as he came in. "I'm only sorry that it happened to you, Jacky, instead of to Jean here. She's the one that needs the lessons in believing. Well, what can I do for you today? Got your minds all made up?"

"I've made up mine," said Jacky. "Jean doesn't count today. She had her wish yesterday, you know. But say, we want you to fix something for us."

"Ah, yes, the little matter of the dummies," said the sparrow gayly. "I remember, you were talking about that before breakfast. How do I know? My dear Jean, don't you believe anything yet? How do I know Jacky isn't pinching your hand this minute to make you keep still, he's so afraid I'll be offended and go away? There, there, don't get so red about it. You can't help being of a practical and nonbelieving mind, I suppose. Born that way, poor girl. But we'll try to train you differently. Come on, Jacky, tell me your wish, and I'll take care of Rachel. What do you want?"

"Want to be a really-truly story-book pirate." And Jacky's blue eyes snapped.

"Hum—a really-truly story-book pirate. They're rather different from the really-truly ones, you know. But here goes, and if you don't like it, don't blame me. Good morning, sir," and then with a funny giggle the sparrow fluttered away. It seemed to Jacky and Jean that his wings made a great deal of noise, and then suddenly

Jean fell plump against her brother, and the two sat suddenly down on—not the nursery floor, as they expected, but on the deck of a ship!

"My!" said Jean in a strange little awe-stricken voice. "The wish has come true—and oh, Jacky, how funny you look!"

"No funnier than you," said Jacky, and then they looked at each other and laughed. Jacky had on a crimson velvet coat with tails, and the lace ruffles in the sleeves, that came way down over his hands. He had a canary-colored waistcoat and tight-fitting breeches, just a little darker, with flashing buckles at each knee and in the rosettes that graced each square, low-cut shoe. There was a sword at his side, that got tangled up most inconveniently in his legs, and a cocked hat on his head. His blond hair had grown long and was tied up neatly with a black ribbon.

Jean was quite as gorgeous. She was arrayed in silks and satins, too, with a great, plumed hat upon her head, quite covering her smooth brown hair, which was piled up into an astonishing number of rolls and puffs.

"Oh, goody!" she cried, as she gazed down at her small self. "It's a long skirt! Oh, goody! See it swish." And across the deck she went, her head twisted about in a truly wonderful manner, so she could see the train sweeping out behind her.

"Look out!" cried Jacky. But he was too late. Jean came full

tilt into something, or somebody, and the next moment found herself sitting flat on the boards, gazing into the eyes of the most astonishing person she had ever seen.

He was a little, weazened-up man, with a very large head and very long arms. He had a shock of red hair, black eyes, a yellow handkerchief twisted around his forehead, and most astounding of all, a belt that fairly bristled with big knives and large, odd-looking pistols.

"Who under the sun are you?" demanded Jean, rather frightened, but still self possessed.

"Blitherin' Bill, yer leddyship," replied the man with a pull at the lock of hair hanging down from under his handkerchief.

"And—and who am I?" went on Jean, determined to have things straightened out.

"The cap'n's sister, yer leddyship," replied Blithering Bill, with a rather astonished expression, and he jerked his head respectfully towards Jacky, who swelled with pride till his sword swung round and tickled his legs and made him jump.

All this time Jean had been carefully working her small person round and round in a vain endeavor to get up, but it was of no use. Her feet were hopelessly tied up in her train, and budge them she couldn't.

"Oh, my!" she wailed. "Help me."

"Jacky and Blithering Bill both ran to her rescue, and pulled her up, red and panting.

The men quite cringed to Jacky, whom they evidently considered the greatest and best man in the world, and to Jean's horror Blithering Bill entertained her with stories of the wild things he had done, the number of ships he had burned and the many men whom he had taken prisoners.

Practical Jean found it hard to remember that it was all make believe, anyhow, and couldn't tell whether to be angry at the man for saying such things or not. Sometimes she almost believed them, until she remembered yesterday.

But as Uncle Jerry was always telling them, "the worst was yet to come." While they sat in state eating a dinner that was queerly cooked and most elaborately served, there was suddenly a great noise upon the deck, and in another moment Blithering Bill came hurrying down the cabin stairs, pulling frantically at his hair, and announcing, "Ship in sight, sir. Barquentine, merchantman, sir—the Sally Ann, from Glasgow, with four guns."

Jacky's face grew red.

"Pipe all the men to arms," he commanded, in a queer, high voice. "Man the guns. Haul up the black flag and give chase. Bill, get out

the cutlasses. Boy, my breast plate. Tell the men they shall have plum duff for supper, and one-thirty-third of the booty to divide among themselves if they fight well. Fall to, all!" And before Jean could get her mouth properly open to talk he was off up the stairs, and she found him pacing the deck, arms folded, forehead frowning, very fierce and warlike.

"Jacky!" she cried, tripping over her train as she ran to him, "Jacky, you aren't really going to fight, Jacky! They're getting the guns ready. You won't fire them? Not really?"

But to her utter surprise Jacky's only answer was to call more orders to the men, who were hurrying about like ants in an ant hill putting up more big white sails and loading the clumsy cannon, while in the distance they could see the small black people on the other ship doing the very same things.

"Oh, Jacky, dear," and Jean caught at his sword as he went by her, "you won't really fight, will you? You remember father scolded so, and mother cried, when you fought Jamie Jones. And this is so much worse, 'cause you're making other folks fight, too."

"Bosh!" and Jacky gave a very high and mighty toss to his head. "You're a silly! I'm a pirate, and who ever heard of pirates that didn't fight? I'd like to know why they invented the Jolly Roger at all if it wasn't for fighting. If you don't like it just go down in

the sitting-room—the cabin, I mean, and stay there. Hi, there, tack to starboard and set the flying jib."

Jean almost sobbed as she went away. "I don't like being in a fairy story," she sobbed. "I don't like it one bit. And Jacky doesn't know a thing about boats. I believe he's giving these orders all wrong, and if we don't fight those other folks and kill them, why we'll be wrecked ourselves."

The Sally Ann was much nearer now. They could see the people quite plainly, and then suddenly plump, a big cannon ball from their own ship fell right beside her, and the water flew up in a way that reminded Jean of Niagara, just for a moment. When it calmed down again, Jean gasped. For there was Jacky, standing by the rail and looking at least three times as big and important as usual.

He told them he was Jolly Jack, the Terror of the Sea, and they looked frightened at the very name. And then, when the two ships came together, there was Jacky, as smiling as you please, all ready and waiting to help the ladies aboard his own ship, while he gave orders to have all the men put in irons and taken down in the hold.

"Thet's allus the way. They just trembles at his name," whispered Blithering Bill, as he passed Jean, and cast an admiring glance at his captain. "They ain't much gunpowder wasted on this boat! Not

nowadays. Our reputation's made, an' we've been writ up so much, all we hev to do is to stand around and rake in the cash."

Jacky was on board the other vessel, looking over the piles of things that his sailors were bringing up on the deck. There were rolls of silks and velvets, casks brimming with golden coins, plates and mugs and dishes of solid, heavy silver, and one casket filled with shining diamonds and rubies and pearls—the loveliest stones that Jean had ever seen.

"Oh, me! Oh, my!" she cried, sinking down and gathering her arms full of beautiful things. "If it isn't all just like a story book—every bit!"

"Of course it is," said Jacky. "I know what I'm about, when I'm wishing. What ho, minions! Carry these treasures to my own ship, throw overboard the guns and then let these people have their vessel back."

"I'm sure I don't know what to do with her," he added to Jean. "One boat is quite enough. Say, Jean, won't we astonish folks when we go home? We'll take mother these silks and things, and father can have the silver stuff, and you can have the jewels, and I'll take the money—that is, if we go home at all. I like being a pirate so much, I think I'll just go on wishing it every day. It's lots nicer to order folks around than to be ordered."

Jean looked doubtful.

"I don't know," she said, "I think—but oh, Jacky, what'll we do about the bird cage? We can't wish anything without that. And how'll we get it if we don't go home?"

Jacky looked desperate. "I won't go," he said. "I'm just going to stay here and be a really-truly story-book pirate all the days of my life. I'm never going to do anything else—so there," and he brought his sword down with a whack on the deck. It was his own deck and he surely had a right to whack it if he chose.

But a loud, commanding voice suddenly sounded in his ear. "Now, see heah, John Livingston Kendall, doan you go whackin' the flo' that way—you'll knock holes in it."

It was Rachel's voice! Jacky jumped, and Jean gave a little scream of dismay. They were not on the deck of the pirate ship at all. The jewels had melted from Jean's hands, the sword was gone from Jacky's side. Rachel saw only two tired, sleepy children as she came hurrying toward them.

"Time to get cleaned up," she said. "It's sundown, an' you' pa'll be along presently."

CHAPTER V

The Adventure with the Policeman

JACKY was so extremely glum that evening at tea, that Rachel insisted on giving him codliver oil afterwards. She said his glumness wasn't natural —that they had both been too quiet all day, but that the color in Jean's cheeks saved her from a dose. It was the only hint they ever had about the "doubles" the Mysterious Sparrow had provided for them, because, of course, they did not dare ask any questions. Ordinary everyday boys and girls are supposed to know what they do during the day without being told, and of course Rachel would never understand that they were not ordinary.

By morning, however, Jacky felt better, and it was with deep regret that he acknowledged that it was Jean's turn to wish.

"Only," he remarked, as he backed away from her, where she sat with the cage in her hands, "for goodness sake, think first. Don't have any more bolster wishes, Jean. I really couldn't stand it."

"Oh, we'll be all right," said Jean calmly. "My mind is made up. If you remember, when the sparrow first asked us, you said you wanted to be a pirate, and I said I wanted to be poor. You've had your wish. Now I'm going to have mine." And she gave the cage a rub that left a big bright spot on its battered sides.

Quick as a flash the Sparrow was there.

"Well," he chirped, "better luck this time, eh? But it's a lucky thing you let Jean wish today, my young man. One of the firmest rules of fairy wishing is, no wish twice. You've had your first and last day as a pirate, so far as I'm concerned. Of course, maybe you can get some one else to accommodate you some day. Well, what is it now? To be poor? Very unusual—very unusual, indeed. Quite wonderful, in fact, but here you go!" and before the words were out of his mouth the children saw the walls melting away. The Mother Goose pictures seemed to be having a race to see which could get away first, the thick green rug slipped out from under them as though it had been buttered, and suddenly their feet rested on a floor that felt like that out in the kitchen, only not quite so smooth

and not nearly so clean, and Jean saw that their clothes had changed again, too.

Jacky was barefoot. He had on a ragged cap and dark blue shirt waist, with a string of a red tie around his neck, and trousers that seemed too large for him, and were certainly badly patched.

As for Jean, she had on shoes, of a kind, though as she remarked, it wasn't a very good kind. Her stockings did not match, and her dress was torn. You wouldn't have known her for Jean at all, if it had not been for her two tight little pale brown braids.

"Well," said Jean, "I did say poor, but I didn't say very poor. I guess we're the poorest there is, Jacky."

"I guess we are," replied Jack cheerfully. "They might have given us a room with more than one window. But, after all, what's the difference? We're poor! We don't have to stay in one room all the time with somebody guarding us, just like we were babies. We can go out. Whoopee, there's marbles in my pockets! Come on, if you don't want to be left. I'm going with the boys," and Jacky's bare feet fairly twinkled out of the door.

Jean stayed behind. She was a born housekeeper. Nothing did she like so well as to pretend she was housekeeping, and here was a chance to do it, really and truly.

The room was not very clean. Jean went over to the closet and

looked in. There was a broom, not as nice as the one MaryanMartha used, but still a broom. Jean had hoped for a little one with a red handle like that used by the girl who lived in the next street, but she had forgotten to mention it in her wish. So she took the larger one, and bravely set out to sweep the room.

She started in well, but the broom was hard to manage, and finally the handle flew up and hit her in the chin, and she put it down.

"I know," she cried, "I must get dinner! Of course there isn't any cook. What fun!" and she ran to the cupboard.

There was a loaf of bread, rather dry, as she found when she poked it, some potatoes, a bowl of beans and—nothing else.

"Oh, dear," said Jean. "I didn't wish I was Mother Hubbard. It's a lucky thing Toddles isn't along. What would he say? Why, he can't exist without chicken bones every day of his life. I'll have to go and buy some dinner. That's plain. And I'll look up Jacky on the way."

But when she got outside she quite forgot dinner. For there were babies—real live babies! Cousin Alice had a baby, but it was not much good. It always had so much lace on, you couldn't see anything but it's head, and when Jean tried to touch it, somebody always said, "Look out, dear—you'll let him fall. Nurse, please take Master Harold away." And he went, just as Jean was longing to

feel him, and hug him, and look into the soft blue eyes, and make him smile and show his dimple.

But these—these were babies that were babies. They were crawling all about, rather dirty to be sure, but friendly, and could be petted for the asking.

The first Jean met might have been Harold, with a few clothes off, and a right cheek dimple instead of a left. She had him in her arms in a minute, and after one big hug, turned to the other little girls with, "Oh, now let's play house, and pretend I'm your mother, and you're all my children, only this is the littlest and sweetest."

Never had Jean had such a happy time before. She could see Jacky down the street. He had won a lot of marbles, and his face was as dirty as his heart could desire, and his hair all in a "wopse" over his forehead. Jean didn't worry about him.

The only thing she did worry about was dinner, and that not till a mother or two appeared, and called the other children in. Then she and Jacky met in the middle of the street—that place always forbidden them before—and discussed matters.

"You really don't suppose, do you," said Jean, "that the Mysterious Sparrow is going to make us go hungry?"

"Course not," and Jacky stuck his nose in the air in a very superior

fashion. "Didn't you say there was bread and beans and potatoes? Can't you cook the potatoes? Let's try."

So back they went, and Jean worked hard over the old rusty stove. She got up a fire, and Jacky peeled the potatoes, and she put them in water, just as she had seen Zillah do.

But though they boiled and boiled and boiled, the potatoes were not very good, because, you see, Jean did not know that the water should be boiling first, and she had put them in when it was cold. They ate a little bread, but it was rather hard, and the tears were very near Jean's eyes.

"I wish I'd said just how poor," she murmured. "I didn't want to starve, even for a day. Just think, Jacky, if it was for always."

Jacky looked serious, but the next minute his face brightened. "Jean," he cried, "there's a dime in my pocket. We can get lots for a dime! Cream waffles, and those funny little sausages they called 'wienies.' I heard the boys telling about them. Come on."

And Rachel would have fainted ten minutes later, could she have seen her two treasured charges, dirty and ragged, standing by the gutter, eating cream waffles from one hand, and holding big rolls stuffed with hot little wienerwurst sausages in the other.

"Um-um, aren't they good?" muttered Jean, between bites.

"Bully," said Jack, and grinned. It was fun to use that word, and not be scolded for slanginess.

After that they roamed about the street as happily as could be.

They did not remember where their room was, and they did not care, because they knew they would not have to find it after sundown, and though they were happy as they were, they rejoiced to think they would have their own beds to sleep in.

But late in the afternoon, they wished they had remembered the street and number. Jean was drowsy from much walking and excitement, and they wandered into a park, sat down on a bench, and were soon asleep, propped up against each other's shoulders. They never thought of being disturbed—especially by a policeman. They had never learned to be afraid of the big, blue-coated men, who helped them across crowded streets so nicely when they were with mother or Rachel.

But it was a very different sort of policeman who began to shake them up and down.

"See here," he said, when he had them fairly awake, "you can't sleep here. Where do you live?"

"No. 11 Anstruther road," said Jacky, quite forgetting.

Now, Anstruther road was a very handsome street, indeed, and the policeman laughed.

"Can't fool me like that," he said gruffly. "Wake up and tell the truth if you can. This ain't no fairy story."

"Oh, but it is," began Jacky, when Jean stopped him.

"What's the use, Jacky?" she whispered, and then, "Please, sir, we've forgotten our address, but we'll find it."

"Oh, no, you won't. You can't pick up lost addresses like lost pins, young lady. You're vagrants. You're coming with me. March!" And grabbing their shoulders again, the big policeman whirled them around and started, pushing them before him.

"Oh, please," wailed Jean. She had heard about a home for vagrant children. Mother sent their old clothes there and Cousin Alice sat on some sort of a board they had up there.

She most certainly did not wish to go there, and she began to cry. Jacky bit his lips hard and thought of trying to duck and run. But he couldn't get Jean away, too, and was too much of a gentleman to leave her.

On they went, everybody looking at them, and pointing in a most unpleasant way, till they came to a big, grim place, with "Precinct No. 3" in stone letters over the door. It was the police station, but they did not know that, because they did not know there were any such things. They thought it was the home, and that was bad enough. But what was much worse, when the doors swung open,

there was Cousin Alice, talking to a big woman in a tight black dress and white apron.

"Here's two for you now, ma'am," the woman said, and Cousin Alice turned and bent her glasses down harder on her nose, as she always did when she wished to look at something very closely.

Jacky and Jean clung together in speechless terrror, but Cousin Alice never knew them at all! How could she, with all that dirt on their faces, and in those clothes? In addition to which, Cousin Alice was quite sure that at that moment Jacky and Jean were being scrubbed for supper in the regulation fashion by Rachel.

She stepped up to the policeman and talked to him, jerking her elbows at the children now and then.

All of a sudden she nodded violently, and going over to them, took a shoulder in each thin hand and began to hurry them along much as the policeman had done.

"I'll take them right in my carriage," she was saying, and was well on toward the carriage door, which John, the wooden-faced footman, was holding, when of a sudden Jacky whispered to Jean, there were two sharp little wrenches, one scream from Cousin Alice, four feet went flying down the street and John forgot to be wooden as he went after them.

They weren't very good runners, and there is no telling what might have happened, had not the sun suddenly gone down.

Still panting hard from the run, they found themselves sitting in the middle of the nursery floor, with the Mother Goose pictures all in position again, and Toddles barking frantically at them.

"My, that was risky," said Jean, and Jacky nodded sorrowfully, as he gazed at the neat brown shoes and stockings that were now upon his feet.

"Supper smells good," he said slowly. "But it was fun being poor."

CHAPTER VI

The Adventures in the Ocean

JACKY and Jean were very much afraid that Cousin Alice had recognized them after all, and that they would have an unpleasant time explaining things when she next came to see them. But as that evening passed, and the next morning, they began to feel safer, though it was two days before they dared take out the bird cage and wish again.

"Because," as Jean said wisely, "if she's going to make a fuss we want to be here to do our own talking. We can't trust things to the dummies."

But Cousin Alice never came, and when they heard that she had taken the baby and gone to the seashore, they drew a deep sigh of relief, and prepared for another adventure next day.

"We might wish to be grown up," Jacky suggested, but Jean shook her head.

"No, thanks; not yet! I had all the long skirts I want for a while, that day we were pirates. And it's such hot weather, I couldn't stand them now at all. You wouldn't like high collars, either. Let's think of something else."

"It is hot," sighed Jacky. "What's the use of wishing for ice cream or lemonade, though, for we get enough; and just one day up in the mountains wouldn't do much good."

"And Cousin Alice is at the seashore," said Jean. Then she jumped up with a sudden little squeal. "I have an idea," she cried; "let's be mermaids."

Now Jean felt very proud of that suggestion. A month before it would never have entered her practical little head. She felt she was learning to be like Jacky, and was surprised when he frowned. She soon discovered why.

"I can't," he muttered. "I won't be a girl, even in a fairy story, and there aren't any merboys that I ever heard of."

Jean giggled. "Oh, I guess there are," she said cheerfully; "anyhow, we can easily find out." And before Jack could object, she had rubbed the cage and the mysterious Sparrow was sitting on the perch winking at them.

"Merboys?" it began, before they had even a chance to explain matters. "Why, of course there are merboys. Plenty of them. What would the dogfish do if there weren't any boys about—not to mention the mermaids themselves? Now, do I really understand that this is a wish?"

"Yes!" cried Jean excitedly, not looking at Jacky's doubtful face, and presto, change! There was a funny twisty feeling in her legs, a twitch of her braids, and then a delicious coolness.

She was floating lazily just under the crest of a big green wave, and her feet were turned into a long, slender tail, that switched back and forth just enough to keep her afloat, while her hair swept out all around her, and in one hand she held a golden comb.

"Oh, that's so," she murmured to herself. "Mermaids do spend a lot of time combing their hair. How silly. It can't be much fun. If the comb wasn't so pretty I'd throw it away."

"Well, don't throw it my way," said a voice in her ear, and as she rolled over she laughed. Jacky was so strange and fishy.

"Jinks, what fun," he cried. "Jean, you did the right thing this time. I'll forgive you the bolster wish. Isn't it cool—and just as pretty. Come on, let's go walking—swimming I mean—and see what we can see."

Off they went through the clear water. Above them were all sorts

She was floating lazily, just under the crest of a big green wave. *Page 58*

of dancing, sparkling lights where the sun was shining on the waves and now and then there would be a heavy black shadow and they knew that they were under a ship.

The fishes paid not the slightest attention to them besides getting out of their way. Jean was terribly afraid of a big sword fish who glared at them from the side of a seaweed-covered hill, where he was resting. But Jacky had picked up a rough stick of coral with shining pink knobs, and flourished it grandly.

"I'll look after you, Jean," he said, and a fat old lobster laughed at the important manner of the youngster till his eyes bulged quite out of his head.

But they got a trifle lonesome after a while. They wanted to see other mermaids and merboys, and they could not find any. It wasn't till they came whack against a great soft black thing, that turned out to be a whale, that they thought of asking anyone.

The whale rolled over, nearly catching them under his big body, threw a lot of water about, and winked sleepily.

"What are you doing, roaming around in school hours?" he demanded.

"Oh!" cried Jean, excitedly, "do merchildren go to school?" and the whale looked very much disgusted.

"Certainly," he responded; "where have you been all your life?

All fish go in schools—look in your dictionaries. And merchildren are fish, aren't they? Look at your tails. Now swim along, and don't bother." And with another great snort the whale went sound asleep again.

Jacky tried to wake him and ask him where the school was, but the old whale merely grunted and would not wake.

"I suppose we'll have to find out for ourselves," said Jean. "There doesn't seem to be anyone about but crabs and lobsters, and they go so slowly they wouldn't be any good as guides. Why, what's that?" for suddenly the water was full of all sorts of swimming things. There were small fish and large ones, tumbling and leaping here and there, and going along in the center was a prim little group of mermaids, each one carrying her gold comb in one hand and a book in the other, while merboys went dashing around, playing tricks with them, and throwing seaweed balls at each other, just as Jacky and his mates threw snowballs in winter.

"Where are you going?" cried Jacky, catching one of the boys by the tip of his tail.

"Home to dinner," answered the youngster, and then as he turned to look, "Why, you're a new boy, aren't you? Where do you live? Come home to dinner with me if you like—and your sister, too. I've got a sister—little one. Too little to come to school. You coming?

There's an old porpoise teaching us now. He does an awful lot of blowing. Here we are. Come in."

Jacky and Jean had not been able to answer one of the many questions, but they followed him through a tall gateway, into the prettiest garden you ever saw. There was seaweed of all sorts and colors, growing along the wall, and in great beds. The walls themselves were of pink coral, and the house was of white. Three or four dogfishes came out to meet them, and at the door was a plump, comfortable merwoman, with a little merbaby in her arms.

She smiled at Jacky and Jean as though she had expected them to come at that very moment, and nothing could have pleased her more than their arrival. As they went into the dining-room, Jean could see two sea urchins putting extra plates on the table, and wondered how they were to sit down, as there wasn't a chair in sight. She saw soon enough, when they all went in, and the rest curled their tails up into neat little hassocks and sat upon them. Jean tried to do the same thing, and to her surprise did it easily.

They had very good things to eat, though what they were Jean couldn't tell, and, what seemed strange, no one asked any questions at all. It seemed odd to Jacky and Jean, who would have been very curious, indeed, if two strange children had come home to their house that way.

After dinner they went through the house, and Jean and Jacky saw the pretty rooms, decorated with coral, the polished sea shells they used for looking glasses, the great soft banks of sponges that served as beds, and the pictures that hung on the walls. "Why," cried Jean, looking at them sharply, "they're water colors."

"Of course," said the merboy. "Where would you expect to find water colors if not in the water? You don't think those silly people up on dry land have them, do you?" and Jean had to bite her tongue to keep from tellling him a great many things that would have surprised him had he heard them.

They went back to school, and the fat porpoise looked at them over his spectacles, grunted, much as the old whale had done, showed them where they could sit down and went on with the lessons, until three o'clock, when they all went tumbling out into the waves again.

Then some one cried, "Let's go to Atlantic City!"

That was where Cousin Alice was, but if she had not known Jacky and Jean as ragamuffins, she very likely would not recognize them as merchildren, so they swam along with the rest.

"It's such fun," a little yellow haired mergirl said to Jean; "those land people do such strange things in the water. They puff and they blow, as whales do, when they get under it at all, and when they do swim they kick in such a peculiar way. You'll laugh so when you

see them. And it's fun to tweak those little pink things they call toes. Toes instead of tails; isn't that funny?" and she threw back her pretty head and laughed till Jean couldn't help laughing, too, while Jacky whispered in her ear, "My, I'd like to have a chance at tweaking Cousin Alice's toes, wouldn't you?"

The strangest part of that was, he had the chance. For Cousin Alice was in bathing. She had a very pretty new crimson suit, and crimson stockings, and a pretty little cap, and she really looked very nice indeed—only, she was telling everyone she did not want to go into the water!

The merchildren, riding in and out just under the crest of the waves, laughed at her, and then, as she started to go in, they suddenly caught her, and pulled her right into the water, Jacky and Jean helping, and before she could catch her breath, Cousin Alice was all wet, and when a big man jumped in and helped her out she told everyone it was the undertow. But it wasn't—it was the wicked merchildren, helped by naughty Jacky and Jean.

The man seemed to suspect something, for he went and got a big net and began poking around in the water with it.

"Oh, hurry!" cried the little merchildren. "He'll catch you!"

But Jacky and Jean were not used to their tails yet, and could not manage them very well, and before they could get away, they were

caught. Jacky tore at the meshes of the net with his hands, and Jean used her broken comb to try and cut them, but it was no use. They were caught and the man hauled them up and looked at them in a queer, squinty way that showed them he was very near sighted. Old Mr. Pettinger looked at things just so.

This man held the net very close, and then poked Jacky with his finger.

"Remarkable," he murmured, "very remarkable. I must preserve these specimens till I can get hold of Prof. Brown, and bring my microscope. I'm sure I've discovered a strange new sea animal."

"Strange new sea animal, indeed!" said Jacky, angrily, but the man did not hear him. He had found an old can and was filling it with sea water, and the next thing they knew, he had popped them in, and was off across the beach as fast as he could go.

"What will we do when he comes back?" wailed Jean, crying so much that there was an extra amount of water in the can. "He'll poke us and do all sorts of horrid things."

Two very miserable children waited for the man to come back, and when they heard his voice, Jean cried again. But Jacky gave a little shout of delight. For just as the man leaned down, took hold of him, and began something about the strange specimens he had found, the sun went down behind the great wide ocean. Jacky

slipped through the big brown fingers with a wriggle and looked at Jean, as she sat in the nursery window seat, still crying a little.

"My, that pinched!" and Jacky sucked his thumb hard while down on the beach a disappointed gentleman was telling of the very strange things he was sure he had put in that can not an hour before, while the famous Prof. Brown stood laughing at him, and saying that he must have had a sunstroke.

"Another narrow escape," whispered Jacky, as Rachel cut the cake for supper.

CHAPTER VII

What Happened to Miss Heckenboffer

FOR a day or two after their marine experience Jacky and Jean did not have any wishes. Uncle Jerry came to stay with them, and Uncle Jerry was enough to make them happy without any help from the fairies.

But the day after he went away, they were very blue and mournful, indeed, and they thought that they needed something to cheer them up.

They thought so all the more when they heard the doorbell ring violently just after breakfast, and MaryanMartha's voice came faintly through the nursery door saying "Yes'm—yes, Miss Heckenboffer. The children are quite well, thank you. Just lay your things off and go right up, ma'am."

Jacky and Jean looked at each other in despair. It was dreadful to lose Uncle Jerry—but to have Miss Heckenboffer as their next visitor was too much. If there was any one on earth whom they disliked more than they did Miss Heckenboffer, they did not know who it was.

This was really too bad, as Miss Heckenboffer was very much interested in them. She had been Cousin Alice's governess, and had taught mother for three years, too. Father had been overheard to say that he really couldn't blame Cousin Alice for being what she was after a life-long course of Miss Heckenboffer, and that he was sure mother only escaped the contaminating influence because she only had it three years, and was too sweet to be spoiled anyway.

Uncle Jerry had laughed, and so had mother, though she shook her finger at him and said he should not talk so. That Miss Heckenboffer meant well, and was a very conscientious and hard working woman. Whereat father had said: "True—all true—and so much the worse for us."

Jacky and Jean had not understood the big words, but they were sure father knew how they felt, and they agreed with him in everything, whether they knew just what he meant or not. He had said no when Miss Heckenboffer wanted to come and teach them. She said she loved mother and Cousin Alice so much, she felt as if she must

teach their children. Cousin Alice said that was a very sweet sentiment, and she and mother had almost looked angry when he told them he wouldn't use up any of Miss Heckenboffer's energy on his children—she could save it all for Harold, when he grew up.

Jacky and Jean had been very sorry for Harold ever since and a little sorry for themselves. Because, though they had the dearest little teacher, who came every day, and whom they loved, Miss Heckenboffer came often, too, as, she said, to see that their education, moral and mental, was being properly conducted. And she worried them.

Now, as they heard her come puffing up the stairs, they looked at each other with wide, frightened eyes.

"Hurry, Jean," whispered Jacky. "Wish us away—somewhere, anywhere. Hurry!"

But Jean held the bird cage without rubbing it.

"She'd suspect us, Jacky," she whispered back. "She'd know about the dummies right away. She'd see through anything, and tell such awful stories about us afterward, and blame everything on father—you know she would. She does that every time we're naughty. We've got to stand it."

"Oh, dear!" and Jacky's voice grew louder. "I just wish we

could make her do things our way." And as he said it he leaned over and gave the cage a quick, hard rub.

Jean jumped, and there came a queer little twittery laugh from the window sill.

They hardly saw the Mysterious Sparrow at all, as he bobbed in, chirruped "All right. Enjoy yourselves," and flew away, laughing so that his plump body waggled from side to side as he went.

Before the children could get the bird cage back in the window seat, Miss Heckenboffer was upon them.

She was puffing a little, for the stairway was rather long, and she was rather heavy. But her eyes were as sharp and gray as ever—like penknives, Jacky thought—her spectacles as bright, her nose as pink at the tip, and her pompadour as high and hard.

Mother's hair always lay up in soft, pretty folds, that made you want to run your fingers through, but Jean always wondered how Miss Heckenboffer managed to make hers look so tight and solid when it wasn't braided.

The first thing she did was to pounce upon the old bird cage. Her "good morning" was so hurried they were hardly certain she said it at all, but the rest was plain enough.

"My dear children! Why, with all your elegant and expensive toys, are you playing with a bird cage that is not only old, but bat-

tered and dirty? Give it to me this instant, and I will speak to Rachel. She is neglecting you, I see, while your mother is away. It is disgraceful."

"She's not neglecting us at all," said Jean stoutly, "and you shan't take our cage!"

Miss Heckenboffer's eyes opened very wide indeed, and she drew herself up very tall.

"Such impertinence——" she began, and Jacky thought that for the first time the Mysterious Sparrow had deserted them.

But as Miss Heckenboffer spoke there was a change. She seemed to wilt somehow, and she forgot what she was saying. Then a worried look came into her eyes and she pattted the cage softly.

"No, no," she said, "it's a pretty cage and Rachel is very good."

Jean sat down suddenly on the floor and stared, but Jacky gave a great whoop and turned a somersault.

They could tell that Miss Heckenboffer wanted to scold him as she always did when he was boyish. But to their own delight and her evident surprise she only smiled and said: "Oh, Jacky, how fine. Do it some more."

It was too much, and Jacky and Jean laughed. Not so Miss Heckenboffer. Her eyes were very angry, though her mouth went on smiling in a really silly way.

She got up and tried to walk stiffly out of the room, but instead she skipped as well as such a squarely built person could skip, and though she tried two or three times to get out into the hall, her feet simply wouldn't go. They kept carrying her round and round the room till at last she fell panting on the window seat.

"Say, you're awfully jolly today," said Jacky. "We like you better'n we ever have before. Let's play hide and seek."

"All right," said Miss Heckenboffer's mouth, though Miss Heckenboffer's eyes were still more strained and angry.

"But first," said Jean, half scared at her own boldness, "first do take off that stiff linen collar and unscrew your hair. You can't be comfortable, you know." And to her own surprise she found herself undoing the prim tie and taking out the hairpins. "Why," she cried, "you've really got pretty hair—for gray hair, of course—and there's a lot of it!'

"Make her braid it," said Jacky wickedly. But though Jean did have it in two tails like her own, with pink ribbons on the end when they started out of doors, she was kind enough to have it done up again, only with soft, pretty gray waves, and she took off the apron into which Jacky had tried to make Miss Heckenboffer squeeze herself.

"She does look awfully funny," she whispered, "but mother re-

spects her and we can't have her look so before other people for mother's sake."

That was a strange day for Miss Heckenboffer. She seemed to understand after awhile that something had happened which she couldn't help. She seemed to think she was dreaming, for Jacky caught her pinching her own arm twice as though to see if she were really awake, and she gazed into every looking glass she passed, evidently expecting to see somebody else instead of herself. It wasn't till noon that she began to look happy.

She had played tag and hide-and-go-seek. She had strayed into the grounds of the empty house and picked flowers for them from the climbing rose bushes that grew so high they could hardly reach.

At lunch time Rachel and MaryanMartha were astonished to see how quiet she was, and wondered because she ate with the children instead of in the big dining-room, where she had always insisted on being served.

After dinner the children were a little at a loss till Jacky suggested mud pies. Miss Heckenboffer's face grew very grave, but out she went and down she sat in their sand heap, and anybody going by would have been astonished to see a large, well-built woman, with gray hair and spectacles, sitting in the middle of a sand heap, with

mud on her nose and sand on her stiff, gray gown, playing as though she were five years old instead of fifty.

When later Jacky suggested fairy stories, she squirmed a little and looked appealingly at Jean. She had never approved of fairy stories, and had liked Jean best, because she did not read them. But Jean was quite changed now.

"Let's!" she cried. "Miss Heckenboffer will read them to us, up in the apple tree." And she hurried off to get the book.

Miss Heckenboffer got stiffly up, shook the sand from her skirts, and went skipping heavily after Jacky as he ran toward the big, low apple tree where father had built them a seat.

"Come on!" cried Jacky, climbing up in a jiffy, and to Miss Heckenboffer's horror, she went, too.

The first step was all right. She planted one foot on the second limb, and got to the broad seat, when suddenly there was a crash, a cry, a laugh from Jacky, who was in a crotch a little higher, and the seat and Miss Heckenboffer went down with a crash—not all the way to the ground, that might have been serious—but just down to the next crotch, where they stuck, tighter and tighter, as Miss Heckenboffer squirmed and wriggled to get out.

Poor Miss Heckenboffer. It really was dreadful for her, after all her years of stiff dignity. She couldn't budge herself, and Jacky

and Jean were not strong enough to help, either. To be stuck in a tree at her time of life!

Jacky and Jean were a little frightened. But they hurried for Luke, who was at the barn, and he brought his ladder, and finally got Miss Heckenboffer out, and down on the grass, where she sat, leaning up against the tree trunk, and looking so tired that even Jacky was sorry.

"We won't tease her any more," he whispered. "We'll let her do as she pleases." But as Miss Heckenboffer sat and sat, just looking at them, Jean suddenly remembered that she could only do what they said.

She consulted with Jacky in whispers, and then said, slowly, "Let's —let's go and take a nap."

It was really a great deal for them to do. For Miss Heckenboffer had fought so hard on that point, insisting that they both needed afternoons naps till they were ten. As a usual thing, they would have done anything sooner than even nod when she was about. When they saw the satisfied look in her tired eyes, they felt that they had really been very good, and all three trailed up to the nursery, where they tucked Miss Heckenboffer up on the couch and went off to the window seats themselves.

It is just possible that they talked about Miss Heckenboffer and

spoke louder than they should. Certainly, though that lady rested her tired body, she did not sleep.

But none of them realized how late it was, till there was a sound of running on the stairs, and father came in, just as the sun went dipping down behind the trees.

Jacky and Jean held each other's hands tight, and grew pale. The day was done. The wish was over. What would Miss Heckenboffer tell?

Father spoke first. "Well, well, Miss Heckenboffer," he said, "I hear you've had an accident. Too bad. Better now? Rested? You look so! I've heard that you were out of doors all day with the children. I declare, it's done you good. Never saw you looking better!"

Jacky and Jean knew from the look in Miss Heckenboffer's eyes that she was wondering whether she would be able to say what she wished, and they saw the satisfaction that came when she found she could.

"Yes," she said, " for all my tumble, I feel very well indeed. I—really, I think I must indulge in healthful out-of-door life to a greater extent." And the children were so surprised they would have fallen out of the window, if it had not been for the bar across it.

"My, that was a close shave for us," whispered Jacky. "What if she'd told?"

"I don't believe she'll ever be so mean again," said Jean wisely. "Let's hurry and wash our own faces before Rachel has a chance to rub our noses off." And putting the bird cage carefully away they hurried after their father and Miss Heckenboffer.

CHAPTER VIII

A Very Successful Wish

AFTER their adventure with Miss Heckenboffer, the children had a rather uneventful time for a day or two. The Mysterious Sparrow allowed them flying trips to England, and to the very top of the Andes, in which Jacky was interested at that time, through a South American story he was reading. England was delightful, but not exciting, and on top of the Andes they had a very stupid time indeed. In fact, there was nothing but snow, and clouds, that were below instead of above them. The novelty of the clouds being down there soon wore off, however, and there was nothing to do, and nothing to eat, and they were cold. In fact, if the Mysterious Sparrow had not appeared with a big dinner basket, and two great cozy rugs of fur, they would have been very miserable indeed.

They were discouraged enough not to try a wish for a day or two, and then a very dreadful thing happened. They were sent to stay with Cousin Alice at the seashore!

It seemed that father must go away on a long trip, and he thought the children would be better and happier down on the shore. When they said "no" he laughed, chucked them under their chins in a way they hated, because it seemed to mean they knew so little what they did want, and told them it would be all right.

"Rachel will look after you," he said. "And Cousin Alice will look after her."

"Will you tell Cousin Alice that?" asked Jean, the practical.

"Well, no, I hardly think so," said father, rather taken back.

"Then," said Jean, "she'll boss us just awful."

"At least she will teach you grammar, and get rid of your slang," and father tramped off down stairs, rather relieved to get off so easily from the two nimble little tongues, that would ask such difficult questions.

And so it was that they went away two days afterward, waving good-by to father, as each clutched fast a new pail and shovel, for digging the immense sand forts which they had planned.

It was fun at the seashore. There were so many other children, and Jacky and Jean, not being used to other playmates, were de-

lighted. Then there was the sand and the bathing, and the tempting white yachts, that they always longed to sail on. But still, there, too, was Cousin Alice.

Cousin Alice would not let them eat in peace. She came to the children's dining-room, and said it was her duty to see that they had food that agreed with them. And to Jacky and Jean, it seemed that the only things she was sure would agree with them were the things that they did not like.

She bothered them by coming in when they were going to bed, and when they were having their after bedtime talk, from one white cot to the other—a talk of which Cousin Alice did not approve. And more than all, she made them be dressed up always after lunch. The mornings were the only times that they could be really happy.

They kept feeling sorrier and sorrier for baby Harold. They had their own mother, who was a dear, and Cousin Alice could not "boss" them always. But for Harold, there was no escape.

One thing made it a little easier. Most of the other children had to be dressed up half the day, too.

One morning, very near lunch time, a group sat on the sands all done up in bathing suits, and all mournful to think how soon they must change those comfortable garments for stiff, scratchy white things, that must be watched every minute.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Jacky suddenly. "I wish we had the cage."

"So do I. Wouldn't we get out of all this quick!" And Jean made a face at a trim, thin back, clad in spotless white, which she could see on the hotel veranda. She knew that back belonged to Cousin Alice.

The other children, however, did not understand.

"What cage?" they cried. "Tell us about it."

And, to his great astonishment, Jacky found himself telling the whole story, though Jean kicked him with her little bare toes, pinched his arm till he squealed, and shook her head hard.

It all had no effect. He went on with the story, and the others gathered closer and closer, with mouths and eyes growing wider every moment.

They believed it—oh, yes, every one of them believed it. When it was time to go in they wanted more and more and the next day they forgot bathing and castles and all. On the third day they demanded that the cage be produced.

Jacky shook his head at first and then he remembered Luke. Luke was always his friend. Luke would send him the cage.

Cousin Alice lectured him roundly that night because of the ink stains on his fingers. But Jacky did not care. He was pretty sure

that a way would be opened for him to get away from Cousin Alice during the daytime, at least.

And sure enough, in a day or two it came—the cage, well wrapped in paper, was left at their hotel, addressed in letters two inches high to "Mr. John Livingstone Kendall, Jr."—an address which made Jacky's heart beat high with pleasure. The clerk was so amused himself that he gave Jacky the bundle, and Rachel knew nothing about it, much less Cousin Alice, who was down at the meeting of the sewing circle on the side porch.

The cage came in the morning and Jacky and Jean smuggled it down on the sands and showed it to the other youngsters. Then, after it had been handled and admired, they demanded that it be rubbed. Jacky took it proudly and rubbed hard. No sparrow, mysterious or otherwise. Jean said he had forgotten how and she took it and rubbed. No sparrow.

The other children began to laugh. They thought that Jacky and Jean had made up the story—all but one dear little girl with wide blue eyes, who had read all the fairy stories she could find.

"Maybe," she whispered, coming close to Jacky's ear, "maybe the Mysterious Sparrow doesn't want to come before so many strangers. Fairies are like that, you know. Try him when you're alone."

Jacky nodded, and he and Jean, explaining to the others, hurried

off behind a bathhouse, sat down side by side in the sand and rubbed again.

Sure enough, the Mysterious Sparrow came!

"Well," he began; "you are a nice pair, aren't you? Expect me to walk out before a whole lot of strangers. Not by a good deal! Don't try it again or I'll forget you altogether. You've given me quite a rest lately or I'd scold you worse. What do you want?"

"We want," said Jacky slowly, "we want you to send everyone in this place to sleep except the children. I want it so we can have all the lunch we want, and all the bathing, and not have to dress up all day. Put them to sleep, like the people were in that story of the Sleeping Beauty."

The Sparrow laughed. "That's easy," he said, "and it'll be fun to watch, too. Go on. You'll be all right."

Jacky and Jean rushed out to the children, and found them gathered around one of the nurse maids, who had come up to look after her charges.

"She's fainted," cried the blue-eyed girl who knew so much about fairies. "My mamma faints, and I know."

For a moment Jacky and Jean were frightened, too, but suddenly they heard a little chuckling voice close by.

"Don't worry. It's a good, natural sleep, quite according to your

wish. Pull her into the shade of the bathhouse so she won't burn all the skin off her nose, and go along."

They drew a sigh of relief and explained. The children shouted with joy. Then they pulled the nurse girl along a little, anchored an umbrella over her head, rolled her neat white apron into a pillow and left her, tearing across the sands to see what had happened to the other people.

Sure enough, the wish had come true—they were all asleep. There was a group of young ladies, with one young man, on the lawn and they had gone to sleep with their croquet mallets in their hands. Some big boys were snoring on the tennis court.

The clerk slept peacefully with his head on the big book where all their names were written. Cousin Alice and all the other ladies of the sewing circle were sound asleep on the side porch with their needles in their hands, and dear old Rachel had dozed off with her head in a pile of the hated white duck suits, just home from the laundry.

The children yelled as loud as they could, and shook a few people, just to see if it would do anything towards waking them. But no one stirred. So first of all they went to the kitchen.

Cooks and waiters were there, asleep, and of course lunch was only about half cooked. Jean, who understood cooking more since

her experience at being poor, was very much afraid that things would burn up. But luckily, the fire seemed to have gone to sleep, too, just as it did in the old fairy tale, and everything was standing still.

The children knew where to find the things they wanted. There was a great freezer of ice cream, and one of strawberry ice. There were cakes and a pile of the daintiest sandwiches made for a picnic party of grown ups that were to have gone out sailing that day.

They filled all the baskets they could find, hurried down to the beach, and such a feast as they had, under the shade of an old wreck that lay there on the sands!

No dressing up that day! They had caught the wish just when they were in their bathing clothes, and in them they stayed. Bare feet twinkled over the sands, and bare heads flashed in the sunshine. There was a crop of freckles gathered that day that was really wonderful. Sick? Of course nobody was made sick. Weren't they in a fairy story? And who ever heard of anything making people sick in fairy stories?

Never were there such good times. After the first they all forgot their sleeping elders, and the Mysterious Sparrow, and everything but their fun. So it was a surprise to them when all of a sudden the sun went dipping down behind the big ocean, and in a whisk their

bathing suits were skipping up through the air, and they felt the touch of stiff duck and linen, hats were pressed on their heads, and shoes crept on their feet. They stood staring at each other in dismay, when suddenly the nursemaid, whom they had forgotten, began to stir. She stretched, she yawned and then suddenly sat upright.

"My goodness gracious sakes alive!" she cried. "It must be mortal late. What ever can have happened? Miles and Marjory Stanton, come here this minute! All dressed up in clean things? Well, who—what—when——" and her eyes grew so very wide and round that Jacky feared they would fall out altogether.

But nobody answered her questions. Nobody has ever answered any of the questions which all the grown ups in that summer hotel asked each other and themselves that day.

For the children never told.

As Jacky and Jean crept into bed that night, Jacky said in the old little way that always amused father, "Well, Jean, my dear, I think we may count that wish as one of our successes."

And Jean answered sleepily, "Yes! Yes! I wish we could have it over every day of our lives."

CHAPTER IX

The Cage Disappears

THE morning after the grown ups all went to sleep there was a thunderstorm. The thunder rolled and roared around the hotel, the lightning flashed in great, blinding sheets, and the rain fell, first in torrents, then later in a steady downpour that promised a day indoors. But the storm without was nothing compared to that inside the hotel. For after breakfast Jacky and Jean discovered that the battered bird cage had vanished. When questioned Rachel had admitted that Cousin Alice had been in their room the night before, sorting things over.

"I found a very disreputable toy that seemed to be an old cage," said Cousin Alice firmly, "and I had it thrown away. It was utterly unlikely that you would have an immediate use for such a thing."

Now Jacky and Jean had always restrained themselves before

Cousin Alice. They had been afraid of her. But the loss of that bird cage was too much.

"It was ours," cried Jacky. "You had no right to touch it. I'll—I'll have you arrested! You are a thief."

And when Cousin Alice, astonished and angry, started to speak, she was met with such a storm that she sharply rang the bell for Rachel, gave very strict orders as to the punishment of the two children and marched off with her nose in the air.

Rachel hadn't approved of that old cage, either, but she was sorry for the children. She had to keep them in their room, because they were, after all, under Cousin Alice's charge, but she gave them very different rations from those Cousin Alice had ordered, and she told them a lot of stories about the South.

Cousin Alice sent for her after awhile and she had to go away and leave them locked in their room, as Cousin Alice had ordered. Then they put their heads together and tried to think things out.

"We've got to find that cage—we just simply must," said Jean, rubbing the end of her little red nose with a very moist pocket handkerchief.

"We've got to get out of here and do something," said Jacky stoutly. "I don't care if it is raining pitchforks and the door is locked. We'll get out and hunt that cage, Jean."

"Y-y-e-e-s," sobbed Jean.

"Look at that door! It leads right into Cousin Alice's room. And there's a transom, and it's open. Her door isn't locked. Let's get over the transom."

The sunshine broke through the tears on Jean's round little face, and in another moment they had brought a table, and put on it a chair, and Jacky's plump legs were waving wildly in the air as he made his way through.

"It's a good ways down," he gasped. "But I ain't afraid, and I guess you won't be."

Jean scrambled up, kicking over the chair as she went, and making a very big racket. She stuck in the transom, too, and Jacky had to get hold of her hands and pull. But as last she landed, breathless, and with a big hole in her pink dress, but unhurt, and the two stood listening.

Everything was quiet. Jean had wisely thrown their rubbers over to Jacky, not so much on account of the rain as to help them in sneaking through the halls quietly; and, borrowing Cousin Alice's pearl handled umbrella, they went quietly out.

It was a sleepy sort of morning. Nobody was doing much. Most of the grown ups were in their rooms writing letters and the children were on the front veranda playing games. They had heard of the

loss of the cage and were as sorry almost as Jacky and Jean. Once in a while they would put their heads together and whisper, only to draw apart when one of the white-capped maids or an anxious mamma came about. It was during one of these times that the blue-eyed little girl saw Jacky and Jean. She knew in a minute where they were going. She whispered to the other children and they looked, too. There did not happen to be any grown ups around just at that moment. There was first a rush to the broad hall, and then a train of umbrellas began bobbing across the lawn—umbrellas under which could be seen legs in half hose, and in black stockings, red shoes and tan—every kind of footwear one could imagine—but all on very small feet. The children were on the hunt.

Ten minutes after they had started they were all well away. Jacky and Jean had given the orders, and the children felt that they were off on a grand lark. They went paddling through the puddles, kicking up little showers of water wherever they could, but always keeping their eyes sharply out for a battered old bird cage with one corner rubbed bright and clean.

It wasn't long before they were all pretty wet, but they did not care for that. Jacky and Jean had promised that whoever found the cage could have first wish, and every small brain in the party was

busy trying to think up something particularly new and strange to ask for.

Meanwhile, up in the hotel there was great excitement. The nursemaid who had gone to sleep by the bathhouse the day before was the first one to discover that the children were gone. She had run upstairs to put some cold cream on her nose, which had got burnt a little, after all, in spite of the children's efforts, and when she came back she looked first on the veranda, and then in the parlor, and then over in the little side porch, where the youngsters sometimes played house. But everything was as still as could be. She could only hear the steady beat of the rain, and the voice of Cousin Alice, who was telling the Presbyterian minister why he ought to be something else. The maid was a little afraid of Cousin Alice herself, but she did get enough courage to poke her head into the little library and say, "'Scuse me, ma'am, but have you seen Jacky and Jean? Miles and Marion's gone, ma'am, and I'm pretty sure they're with the other two."

"My little cousins are securely locked in their room," said Cousin Alice severely. "Don't annoy me. Now, Mr. Peabody, I am sure that even you will admit——" But what Mr. Peabody was to admit, no one ever found out, for just then the door burst open, and Rachel appeared, her eyes big with fright. "Oh, Miss Alice," she cried,

"Jacky an' Jean's gone! Dey room's all locked up, an' dey's all dun gone! Dey's dead, I know dey is, an' you done it, Miss Alice, a throwin' away dat cage, an' den scoldin' 'em so cause dey sassed a little."

"Gone!" and Cousin Alice looked frightened, too. She really was fond of Jacky and Jean and meant to be nice to them.

In a minute she was running up the stairs, faster than she had allowed herself to run for years, and was in the children's room. By this time other nursemaids and a half dozen mothers were hunting and calling, and the clerk and the waiters were all running wildly around looking for the lost youngsters.

Pretty soon the blue eyed little girl who knew about the fairies was brought in, wet through, and crying, because she had not found some sort of cage. Then came Miles and Marion, with torn clothes and scratched faces, and they, too, were crying about that cage.

"Mercy me!" said Cousin Alice, "I didn't know I was going to upset all the children in the place when I threw away that horrid old cage. I'll buy you all new ones tomorrow. I'll go to the city on purpose." But the three children only cried the louder, and were understood to say that new cages would be no good at all.

All the grown ups were in despair. What was the matter with the children? One by one the little folks came, all wet, all crying, all

talking about that mysterious cage. They would answer no questions, and they would not tell where Jacky and Jean were. Maybe they did not know.

From being worried, the mothers and nursemaids and hotel people were getting angry. There were only three children still gone—the smallest boy of the lot, and Jacky and Jean. People were still hunting for them, but it was evident that they would get more scolding than the others had, when they were brought in. The other children were beginning to have a rather hard time as it was. And then all of a sudden, the rain stopped, without any warning, and everybody began to smile just as the sun did.

"My goodness!" said the nursemaid who was scrubbing the dirt off Miles and Marion, and doing it less gently than she might. "What was I mad about, anyhow? Poor Miles, did I scrub his face too hard? I won't any more."

Rachel stopped short in the middle of a wail, and even Cousin Alice began to smile. "We're doing an immense amount of worrying, seems to me," she said. "The children are safe, I know. Rachel, lay out dry clothes for them, and get some milk ready to heat at once when they come in. Why, there they are now, and little Geordie Emmets is with them."

"And dey's got de cage," cried Rachel. Sure enough, the children

were coming up the walk, as merry as could be, Jacky carrying the cage proudly before him.

Everyone was glad to see them and the children all came out and gathered round them, and the hotel man gave them peanuts for nothing. But they were anxious to get away from the grown folks, and in a few moments went to a corner of the big porch.

"Well," said the blue eyed little girl breathlessly, "who found the cage, and what's the wish?"

"He found the cage, and he's wasted the wish," said Jacky rather scornfully, as he pointed to Geordie.

Geordie drew down the corners of his mouth and looked unhappy.

"What did he wish?" asked Miles and Marion together.

"I—I found the cage way out on the shore," said Geordie. "It was right in the water, and I had to wade in, and I got all wetted up—'way up. And muvver scolds when I get wet, even if it's just a little bit. So I said, before I thought at all, 'Oh, my, I hope I won't get scolded, nor anybody else! I hope all the muvvers will be lovely all day!' And so we can't have any fun."

The other children looked thoughtful a moment.

"Wasn't it a shame?" asked Jacky.

"Well, I don't know," said Miles. "They were awful mad, and getting madder, and we all were awful wet, and torn. You weren't

here to see, you know. But the change was—great. I don't know, Geordie. I guess you didn't waste that wish, after all."

And Geordie's mouth went up and his eyes smiled again.

CHAPTER X

The Change of the Sparrow

AS it happened, there were no more chances to take the other children off on a lark, for only the day after the cage was lost and found father came down to stay a day or two with them, and tell them about mother, whom he had seen. Then as they very much wanted to go home, he took them with him when he went. They were very glad to get home and see Zillah and MaryanMartha, and Luke, and Jasper and Toddles. Toddles nearly barked his head off with delight, and it was really through him that they came to wish their next wish, which, to say the least, was a peculiar one. Luke had taught him some more tricks, so that he was quite an accomplished dog, and the idea for the wish popped into Jacky's mind when he saw Toddles play dead, chase his tail,

dance a jig, and pretend to read the paper, with Zillah's spectacles perched on his nose.

"I wish," said Jacky the next morning, when he had rubbed the cage, "I wish that Jean and Toddles and I were part of a circus."

"Oh, Jacky!" gasped Jean, to whom the wish was as great a surprise as it was to the Mysterious Sparrow, who stared with astonishment. "You do think of the most original things," he said. "It's really quite a pleasure to hear what you have to say. Such a change from the regular want-to-go-to-the-moon, and turn-me-into-a-fairy, and-give-me-lots-of-money wishes we generally get. Certainly, go along to your circus, and may you enjoy it!"

Then suddenly he began to chuckle.

"Look here," he said, "I'll give you a novel act that will make you famous in your one day. It's going to be fun, and I'll take a hand myself. This will be a bird and dog act. You'll see. 'The Marvelous Bird and the Talented Dog.' My, we'll make things howl! And don't you worry at all. I'll manage everything."

Quick as a wink everything was changed, and Jacky and Jean found themselves outside a group of great white tents, with Toddles beside them, wagging his fringe of tail and sitting on his back was a great blue and gold parrot, wonderful as to color and size, who

winked at them and remarked in the best of English, though with a cracked sort of voice, "It's your humble servant. How's my make up?"

"Fine!" and Jacky grinned with delight as he and Jean went along to the tent where things were being made ready for the great parade.

They found the manager, and busy as he was he stopped to talk to them. Toddles amused him. Certainly Toddles never had been so funny before—and he never was again, either. But the parrot made him stare. "Never saw one with such coloring or of such a size. Where did you get him?" he asked.

"None of your business," cried the parrot shrilly, and the showman stepped back, stared and laughed.

"Smart as he is handsome, ain't he?" he asked. "What'll you take for him? I'll pay well."

"Not for sale, not for sale," cried the parrot. "Will you hire us?"

"Hire you? I should say I would," and the manager trotted them off instanter to a place where he talked business to them, and the parrot whispered things they were to say. They did not understand what was going on at all till the manager said, "Where are your costumes? You must have 'em for the parade. You'll have to ride in that, you know." As if that wasn't just what they wanted!

"Costumes! We haven't any," and the children looked blank.

"Not come yet, I suppose. Well, I think I can fix you up. Come

this way," and in a moment they were in a tent where rows of gaudy costumes hung, red and blue and purple and pink, with spangles galore. There was a fairy costume that fitted Jean nicely, and a little red suit, tight fitting, made Jacky into as saucy a little red imp as ever was seen.

They were a very pretty party as they came out again, the children in their fancy suits, the parrot in his feathers, and Toddles gay in red ribbons and a silver bell.

"Can you ride?" asked the manager gruffly, and when the children said yes, he put them both up on great white horses, taller than any that father had in his stables. Jean was a bit frightened just at first, but the parrot whispered in her ear that she was to do just anything she wanted to—that he would make things possible. And so she climbed up on the tall horse, aided by a big circus man who called her a jim dandy girl and patted her cheek kindly. "Don't you be a bit scared," he said. "I'm the best rider in the show, and I'll be right handy by to look after you. It's a pretty big horse for such a midget, but you've got pluck, I know."

After that Jean wouldn't have let on for a moment that she was afraid. The wonderful parrot perched on her shoulder. Toddles was put on the saddle before Jacky, and sat as straight and as proud as though he had been on the seat of a steady going carriage. Then

they saw the great, gay wagons filled with wild beasts brought out, and Jean trembled when the lion gave a great roar just as his wagon passed her. The soft footed camels with their great humps seemed bigger than they ever had when she was just watching them from the street, and as for the elephants, when Goliath, the biggest, came toward her, she felt as though a whole big building was moving.

She and Jacky were put just in front of the elephants in the parade. The manager told them that as soon as possible they should have a nice little wagon all their own, drawn by six spotted ponies.

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Jean. "Why didn't we think and ask the Mysterious Sparrow for that ourselves?"

"What?" said the manager sharply, and Jean turned red and kicked her big horse till he moved away.

That ride was something the children never forgot. It was hot and dusty, to be sure, and they often wished that they could go a little faster. But they were the observed of all observers, the envy of all the children, and the delight of the grown folks.

"Oh, look, look at the fairy and the little red imp!" cried the youngsters all along the route, and then people would laugh at Toddles, and stare at the wonderful parrot, and now and then he would fly over Jean's shoulder and go over the heads of the people, calling

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out funny things all the time, till people laughed and stared in wonder.

The children were very tired when at last the little village of white tents came in sight again, and were glad to have the big circus man help them down from their tall horses.

There was a wonderfully good smell in the air, and the big circus man winked and smiled as he saw Jacky sniff.

"That's right—it's dinner," he said, and both the children beamed, while Toddles barked loudly, and the gorgeous parrot cried "Hurrah! Sausage and snipe for me!" and jeered at the big circus man who tried to catch him.

Nobody was allowed to lay a finger on his handsome feathers. He perched always on the shoulder of Jacky or Jean, and pecked so fiercely at any curious hands that no one dared come very near.

At dinner time he took scraps of everything on the table and jabbered away at a great rate. The fat lady said he was just too sweet for anything, and the living skeleton said that if he had that bird he'd soon lose his profession—he would grow so fat with laughing.

After dinner came the scramble to get ready for the show. Jacky and Jean were to appear in the same costumes that they had worn in the parade, so that they had nothing to do and wandered about looking at the other folks as they made ready to go into the ring and

watching the horses as they pranced about, as eager for the noise and music and excitement as anybody.

Jacky and Jean had not a very clear idea as to what they would do when they got into one of the three rings that they could see through the opening of the show tent. But when they were told, on they went, trusting perfectly to the Mysterious Sparrow, or the Wonderful Parrot, as he was now.

Everyone in town had heard of the pretty children, the clever dog, and the beautiful bird that talked so oddly and when they stepped into the ring there was a burst of applause that made Jean a little frightened. How they did it, they never knew, but they found themselves putting Toddles and the parrot through the most wonderful tricks. They even did some themselves. Jacky stood on his head, and let the parrot perch on his feet. Jean and Toddles did a dance together that brought storms of applause, and the Wonderful Parrott delivered a speech that made people stare with surprise while they clapped and laughed.

Never had such an act been seen. The circus manager was pleased as Punch and told all the things he would do for them over and over again. It made Jacky almost sick to think that one performance would be all he could have. This was better than being a pirate. After the show was all over he went out and watched the men care

for the wild beasts, fed the elephants himself, and made friends with a tiny baby lion, no bigger than Toddles, and more playful.

Everyone about the show was petting them, and in the town people who had not meant to go to the circus were getting ready to go and see those children and the dog and parrot about whom everyone was talking.

The tent was jammed that night—but where were the children? Nobody could discover them anywhere. The manager was nearly frantic. They had had their suppers, and had wandered over by the camels. The big circus man who had ridden near them in the parade had seen them go that way at sunset, with Toddles frisking on before, and the gorgeous parrot shining in the sunlight as he circled over their heads. Then somehow he had lost sight of them.

He was nearly frantic, for the people in the tent were calling for his new performers, and they had vanished as mysteriously as they had come. But he was not the only one disappointed. For Jacky and Jean, safely tucked in their white beds at home, were tossing restlessly as they spoke of the circus, and what everybody must be doing.

"It was the best wish yet," said Jacky with a sigh.

"I'll dream of it for weeks," said Jean.

And then silence fell over the room, while out in the barn a be-

wildered little dog tried once more to do the tricks he had done that day, and somewhere or other a fairy sat and chuckled to himself over his latest prank.

CHAPTER XI

The Traveling Cloak of "The Little Lame Prince"

MY, that's a good story!" and Jacky drew a deep sigh, and blinked a little, as he threw down the book that told of the story of "The Little Lame Prince."

Jean was crying, and didn't care who knew it. "It's an awfully sad story," she said, mopping a tear off the end of her small nose. "I don't see why they have to make things so teary, do you? You can't help feeling sorry for the poor little Prince, even when he's having good times with his fairy godmother, or riding around on that cloak of his—wasn't that a wonderful cloak? Oh, Jacky, I've thought of something!"

"What?" and Jacky's eyes turned back from the window to Jean,

where she sat on the nursery floor, all starched and clean and ready for the day.

"Why, let's us have a traveling cloak, too, Jacky. We haven't a fairy godmother, but we have the Mysterious Sparrow, and he's just as good."

"May be he wouldn't know about it," said Jacky. "It's an old story, you know—it was mother's book when she was a little girl, and may be the Mysterious Sparrow wouldn't understand what we were after."

"Oh, yes he would," said Jean, whose trust in the Mysterious Sparrow had grown surprisingly, until now she believed in him even more than Jacky. "There isn't anything he can't do."

She was interrupted by a soft little chuckle. "Thank you, madam," said the voice of the Mysterious Sparrow. "That's a great compliment from you. Rub that cage and I'll appear."

There was a scrambling and then out came the cage, and in a trice the Sparrow stood in its door, nodding at them.

"A cloak?" he said. "I think you were talking about a traveling cloak, like that used by the 'Little Lame Prince?' Certainly, my children. His fairy godmother and I were the best of friends, and to tell the truth I helped her make that cloak. Here's the very same one, with my compliments." And in another second Jean held tight

in her little fist a small, dark bundle, as dusty and ragged as that in the story. "Have a good time," said the Sparrow, and fluttered rapidly away.

Jean untied the many knots, and the cloak spread out and out till it was really a good-sized article.

"Come on!" she cried excitedly. "Hurry up. I want to go 'way, 'way off. What was it that the prince used to say? Oh, I know—'Abracadabra.' Oh, Jacky, we're going!" And going sure enough they were. The cloak, with the two children sitting comfortably on its ample folds, floated gently out of the window, across the garden, and down the long road that led to the open country.

"Faster!" cried Jean, clapping her hands. "Faster, faster!" And off went the cloak, skimming along like a great gray bird. At first it floated quite low, so that the children could look over the edges, and see the people and the houses and fields. But soon it shot far up into the air above the clouds, which floated below them like soft white cushions.

"Humph!" said Jacky. "This reminds me of that trip to the top of the Andes."

"Only it's not so cold," said Jean, and she lay flat on her back and gazed up into the great blue sky that spread so far above her.

"I wish," she murmured, "I wish I had a great big box of marsh-

mallows," and as she said the words a box filled to the brim with snowy squares sank softly down beside her.

"U-um!" said Jacky. "Give me some," and they munched contentedly, while the cloak flew onward.

At first the mere motion pleased them, but after a while Jacky grew restless. "I wish we'd get somewhere," he said. "Where are we going? Do you know?"

"Why, no, I don't," said Jean. "I wonder if we're going anywhere in particular. Of course we aren't, Jacky. We haven't said where we wanted to go. I'd like a look at mother, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, yes! Abracadabra, tum-tum-ti! If you please, Mr. Cloak, we'd like to fly over where mother is, and have a good look at her."

Quick as a flash the cloak dipped, swept around in a great circle, and started off in quite a new direction.

The children soon felt the soft mistiness of a cloud about them, and the next moment, looking over the sides, they could see the earth again, and saw they were flying over a beautiful stretch of country, with many mountains, which the traveling cloak dodged among as airily as could be. There were some of the prettiest flowers up on those mountain slopes, and Jean admired them, and tried to pick some, but the cloak always went just too far away. "Oh, dear!" she cried, "I would so like to take some to mother."

"Well, then, ask the cloak. Here, I'll do it for you," said Jacky grandly. "Abracadabra, tum-tum-ti. Please, Mr. Cloak, may we get out and pick some flowers to take to mother?"

The cloak gave a little dip, much as if it were nodding its head, and settled gently down on a pretty slope, where the sunshine lay warm and bright on a whole garden full of posies.

"Oh, goody!" cried Jean, and scrambled out in a jiffy, going down on her knees among the flowers. Jacky helped her, and in a few moments they had great bunches of red and pink blossoms, more than their hands could hold, and they went back and laid them in the folds of the great black cloak. Then hand in hand they climbed down into the dearest little glen, with a brook tossing along over the stones at the bottom of it, and Jacky was quite sure he saw fairies hiding among the ferns and mosses there. Jean looked, then shook her head doubtfully. She believed fully in the Mysterious Sparrow, but other fairies she was not so sure of.

However, there was no discussion, for none of the little people appeared, and Jacky and Jean were too much in haste to see mother to go hunting for them. Back they went to the cloak, after a long drink of the clear water, and started off again.

The cloak went lower and lower, till it seemed to Jacky and Jean that people must see them. It wasn't till they went right by the win-

They were flying over a beautiful stretch of country. *Page 108*

dows of a country house and a woman looked through and through them that they realized what it meant.

"Why," cried Jacky, "they can't see us at all."

"That's it," said Jean. "Isn't it fun?"

In a few minutes they came in sight of a big hotel, with verandas and long walks and a pretty lake near by, and the cloak stopped right over it. A little door seemed to open right down through the roof, and lo and behold, there was mother. She was lying on a couch, still pale and thin, but oh, so much better than when the children saw her last, and she was reading a letter aloud to grandma. They could hear her quite plainly, and the letter was from father. He was telling her about Cousin Alice, and though grandma looked very much shocked at the things he said, she laughed a little, too, and mother laughed a great deal.

"I wouldn't let the children hear me for anything," she said, "for Alice does mean well, but you know how funny and fussy she is. Poor dears! I do wish I could have them down here. I simply must see them pretty soon. I can't stand being without them so long! I wonder if they've grown any?"

Jacky and Jean jumped up in the cloak, never thinking that no one could see them, or hear them either.

"Mother!" they cried. "Mother, we're here! Just look! We're

not grown very much, and oh, we do want to see you—more than you want to see us!"

But mother never stirred. She lay with the letter in her hands, looking out of the window, and smiling a far-away little smile.

"I must hurry and get well, so I can go back," she said. "Come, I'll go for a walk, and ask the doctor how soon I may go home. I am lots better, you know."

"What about the flowers, Jacky?" whispered Jean. "I wonder if we could leave them? Do you suppose that they are invisible, too?"

"We might try," said Jacky. "Let's ask the cloak now, while she's in the other room getting ready. Abracadabra, tum-tum-ti. Please, Mr. Cloak, can we go down and leave the flowers for mother?"

The cloak sank lower and lower, till they were right in the room, but when Jacky tried to climb out, somehow he couldn't. The cloak sailed up to a little table and bumped softly against it, as a boat bumps at a wharf. "That's a chance for us," said Jean, and leaning over, they piled the table high with blossoms. The last had not left their fingers when up shot the cloak, so rapidly that they nearly lost their breath. Then it stopped where they had been before, and they saw mother come out, ready for her walk. Would she, could she, see the flowers?"

They nearly dislocated their necks, trying to see everything, and then suddenly gave two whoops of joy that would have frightened the hotel people could they have heard them. For mother had given a little cry, and sprang towards the posies.

"Oh, see, how lovely!" she cried. "Where did they come from? Who could have sent them? Somehow they remind me of the children. They used to bring me flowers like that. I hope they won't forget to do it again when I get home. I'm going to wear a big bunch of these." She went out with them pinned in her belt, and Jacky and Jean giggled with glee as they watched her, and followed high above her head.

They did not tire of watching her till she went in to lunch, and then they found they were hungry, too, and asked the cloak for a picnic lunch up in the mountains. They got it, and munched away happily. Afterward they took another look at mother, and then went for a little ride over New York and Boston and Washington and a few of the other big cities they had never seen. The magic cloak was a very accommodating one, and they were just thinking of a trip to China, when Jacky looked at the sun.

"My!" he cried, "it's nearly down. Just think if we got there and the wish ended before we got home. There'd be no bird cage for us to rub, to get back tomorrow. Let's go home."

"All right," said Jean, "I'm tired anyway. Abracadabra, tum-tum-ti. Please, Mr. Cloak, I want a pillow and a nice silky rug to go over me. Oh, how nice!" and in two seconds Jean was asleep, while Jacky sat alone looking down at the country as the cloak hurried them homeward from their great day of travel.

"I do wish," murmured Jacky, "I do wish we could wish things twice!" And then his head dropped against the side of the cloak and he never woke till Rachel shook him and told him to wake up and get washed for dinner. Then he was sitting in the nursery window seat, with Jean beside him, and the wonderful traveling cloak had vanished.

CHAPTER XII

Wishing for Others

A WAVE of goodness had struck the house of Kendall. Jacky and Jean had been to one of Cousin Alice's missions with her, and the things that they saw there made them very serious indeed. They had been poor for one day in the course of their fairy experiences, but they had not seen the really hard side of life after all—it had only been for a day and they knew it.

"I think," said Jean, propping her elbows on the window seat and sinking her chin in her hands. "I think that we have been awfully selfish with our wishes."

"I—I'm afraid we have," said Jacky, mournfully. "We didn't think, but Cousin Alice says that that is no excuse at all."

"Well," said Jean the practical, "it's never too late to mend. That's what mother is always telling us, you know. Let's mend today, Jacky."

"But what shall we wish for? We can't do anyone good for more than a day."

"Then we'll do it for the day at least. But let's ask the Sparrow. Maybe he can advise us. Let me rub."

The bright spot on the old cage was given a hasty dig, and the Sparrow flew lazily through the window, and settled down on the perch.

"Well," said he, "I understand you want to consult me. At your service. Talk away."

"It's not about ourselves," said Jean gravely. "It's about other people. We think we've been selfish in our wishes."

"Yes," said Jacky, bravely, "and we're willing to do most anything if we can do something for other people with them. Something that will last. Can't we?"

The Mysterious Sparrow looked at them oddly from his fluff of feathers.

"Would you be willing to work hard yourselves?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jacky and Jean together.

"Well, then," said the Sparrow, "why don't you wish for a spe-

cial train, and fill it up with children, and take them out for a day in the country?"

"That's lovely," cried Jacky, but Jean shook her head. "We can do that of course," said she. "Or we can get a boat and take them somewhere. But after all that's only for one day, you know. We want it to last over. Can't you fix it?"

The Sparrow thought a moment, and then gave a happy little hop. "I've got it," he cried. "It's against the rules of my profession to let your wish last over a day, or to let you ask the same thing twice. But I tell you what. I'll get your boat—that was a good idea, Jean —and send you the children, and then put it into the head of a rich old duffer I've had my eye on for some time to go along with you. He can't help opening his purse strings after a day spent with those youngsters. Well, I've a good deal on my hands, and must hurry. Allow me to congratulate you on this wish. Goodby." And he vanished, without even taking the trouble to fly away.

Jacky and Jean sat waiting. The transformation was not as quick as usual, but in a few minutes they felt themselves caught up, whisked through the air at a great pace and then left to catch their breaths on the deck of a big, clean-looking white boat, that was puffing at a wharf while busy men ran all about her, making everything trim and tidy.

Not a soul was on board as yet, besides the children and the crew, but in a moment they heard a murmur and ran to the side. There, coming down the street, was a horde of children—big ones and little ones, babies, some with big sisters, some with tired, pale mothers, boys that romped and shouted, boys that limped along with canes or crutches, girls who brought poor, patched-up dollies and girls who brought a lot of younger children.

Jacky and Jean stood staring at the throng. Even after their day at the mission, they had not believed that there were so many poor children in the world.

"What'll we do with them?" gasped Jacky. "The Sparrow said we had to work."

"He'll show us," said Jean, trustingly, and craned her head to see them coming on board. The crew seemed quite used to it. They helped the little ones, joked the big ones, and smiled kindly at the mothers. In a trice everyone was on board, camp chairs and steamer chairs appeared by dozens, everybody began to get good places for the trip, and soon the ropes were cast off, there was a long shriek from the whistle, and they were steaming away, out into the broad, blue river, with flags flying and a band playing for dear life on the upper deck.

How Jacky and Jean did fly about, to be sure! They were every-

where, making folks comfortable and looking after the babies, and seeing that the band got its share of lemonade. They hardly thought that they had started when with another long-drawn shriek the boat drew up to a dock that reached out from a green shore, the gang-plank was thrown out, and their charges went streaming off the boat as eagerly as they had gone on, for a long day with the grass and the trees, pure air, and plenty to eat.

It was then that Jean had a chance to speak to a strange, haughty old man, whom she had noticed first on the city wharf.

He was very tall and very thin, with gray side whiskers, and even on that warm summer day he wore a frock coat all buttoned up, and a silk hat. She had seen him walk on board, as though he was doing something against his will and remembering Miss Heckenboffer, she felt sorry for him.

"Who did you come with?" she asked him shyly. "Have you lost your friends?"

The old man looked down at her and growled, "No—haven't any to lose."

"Oh, dear me!" cried kindly little Jean. "Then you're worse off than these people, aren't you? They all have friends!"

"Worse off! Why, child, I have five million dollars!" and the

old man swelled up so Jean feared he would break the buttons off his coat.

"Have you?" she asked, not properly impressed at all. "That's nice, of course, I suppose. We've got lots of money, too, and we're often very lonesome. Seems to me you can't do interesting things at all when you're rich—except things like this."

"Do you call this very interesting?" asked the old gentleman, with his brows drawn down so very far that Jean could hardly see his eyes.

"Yes, of course I do. Don't you?"

The old man coughed. "Well, I haven't quite decided," he said. "Let's follow the rest on shore, and see what they are doing."

Jean thrust her small fingers through his fist, and though he looked astonished, he let them stay there.

On shore, everything was bustle and fun. There was a merry-go-round, and Jacky was busy giving out tickets, and seeing that all the littlest ones had a ride.

Over by the long tables, the mothers and some of the older girls were setting out luncheon, under the orders of a large, plump, smiling woman whom Jean had never seen before, but who gave her such a saucy, twinkling little wink out of one corner of her eye when no one else was looking that Jean laughed outright. "What's

the matter?" asked the old gentleman, and Jean grew very red. How could she tell him that she had recognized in that pleasant-faced, cheery old lady, the Mysterious Sparrow?

Fortunately he did not notice that she had not answered. He was too busy watching a group of little tots, who were grabbing up whole handfuls of dandelions and hugging them tight against their dirty frocks. "Aren't they just dear?" asked Jean. "Don't you wish that dandelions grew down in the city? Don't you think it would be dreadful to be little, and have no flowers at all, or any place to play?"

The old gentleman scowled again. But nevertheless he remembered something that he had not thought about for years—the climbing white rose that had grown by his window when he was a little boy, the way that he had watched in the spring for the buds, and how pretty the flowers had been, when they came nodding in at his window in the morning. He walked on without saying anything at all, and Jean went with him. That wink the Mysterious Sparrow had given her, told her a very great deal. She knew, what she had suspected before, that the old gentleman was the rich old gentleman that the Sparrow had promised should come. And Jean made up her mind that she would do all she could to make him open those purse strings of his. She had never seen a man who kept his money in a purse with strings, but if this one did, then the strings should come undone.

She took him about from group to group and showed him everything and everybody that she could think of. At dinner she made him help pass the sandwiches—which were unusually good—and then he carried plates of ice cream and heard the chorus of joyful "ohs" and "ahs" that went up from the warm little throats that were fairly aching for something cool.

The old gentleman said less and less, but watched and listened more all the time, and after dinner, when Jean finally left him, and went to help put a lot of sleepy babies to bed in a row of neat white cots that suddenly appeared from nobody knew where, he was talking to little lame Johnny James, and Johnny was telling him all sorts of things, in his bright, cheery way.

"Who's managing this excursion?" asked the old gentleman abruptly, when Jean came back.

"We are," said Jean promptly.

"You?" and the old gentleman looked as astonished as he felt.

"Yes. We're little, but we do so love to do it, and a—a friend—gave us the money for today. But you see, it'll all be gone. We've spent every cent, and I don't know where we'll get any more. They do need it so—good times, and good dinners, and all those things—that we have right along, you know."

The old gentleman scowled again. But somehow he did not look nearly as cross as he had.

"Well, well," he said, "I shall see about that. I've always hated giving to this sort of thing. I didn't need such things and I forgot I'd had them all once, and liked them, too. See here, little girl, could you run a shebang like this often?"

Jean gasped. She knew very well that she could not have run that had it not been for the help of the Mysterious Sparrow. But then there was Cousin Alice—she was good for this sort of thing, though she did scold too much. Cousin Alice would help. So she said yes, and the old gentleman nodded. "You're a clever little girl," he said. "I'll send you the money for a trip like this once a week, all summer, and in the winter we'll see what else we can do."

"Oh, thank you," cried Jean, and before he could stop her, she had thrown both her arms around his neck and given him a great big kiss. He scowled, but he liked it, after all, and he had never enjoyed a dinner so much as he did the one he took that night, after his strange day.

As for Jacky and Jean, they were almost too tired to eat. But they were not too tired to plan the next trip before they fell asleep and make up their minds that of all their wishes, this one had turned out to be the very best.

CHAPTER XIII

Where the Sweet Things Grow

"LOOK here, Jean," said Jacky one morning a few weeks after the great steamboat ride. "Look here, don't you think we've been unselfish enough for once? Couldn't we have one wish—just one—all to ourselves again?"

Jean's face brightened. It had been very pleasant, the giving of things to all those people who needed everything from food to books, but it had been a little—well, monotonous.

"I'm so glad you said that," she exclaimed. "You know I've just been longing to have a wish all my own again, but I felt so mean about it, I wouldn't 'fess up. It wouldn't be very awful, would it, Jacky? We've really done a lot. There was that steamboat ride, to begin with, and all the lovely things that nice old Mr. Higgins has

done, besides the people we've sent to places and the money we wished for Jimmie Ryan, so he could go to school and learn enough to be an alderman some day, and the great doctor that we had to see Tessie's back, and—oh, lots of things. I think we might have a wish. What shall it be?"

That was the trouble. They couldn't think of a thing. At least not anything fine enough to make up for all the weeks they had been wishing for other people.

In the midst of their discussion Rachel called them in to breakfast, and to Jacky's huge disgust there stood a great plate of bread—plain, white bread. Jacky was a very particular young gentleman, and he liked toast or muffins, or popovers, or hot rolls for his breakfast.

"Oh, dear!" he wailed, as he caught sight of the plate. "Nothing good at all. Oh, dear!"

"You mustn't say such things," warned MaryanMartha. "It's good for you. The doctor told Rachel you must have plain bread instead of hot bread. I heard him."

"I won't," and Jacky's blue eyes flashed. "I won't ever eat any of their old plain bread, so there! I wish I lived where there wasn't any bread at all—just candy and cake—and pie! I do like pie."

"Why, Master Jacky," began MaryanMartha's voice, but some-

how it trailed away into silence. Jacky felt the strange dizzy little feeling that always came before any of his wishes, and the next moment he and Jean sat staring at each other in the greatest surprise. For they were in a strange place, sitting on odd-looking grass, under a peculiar tree, and neither of them understood just why.

"Whatever happened?" asked Jean.

"I don't know," said Jacky. "Where was that cage?"

"Why," explained Jean, "I ran back and took it out, so it would be ready as soon as we were through. I didn't get in sight of the breakfast table at all. I had the cage in my hands when all of a sudden everything went whisk, and here I was."

Jacky laughed. "That's about what happened to me," he said. "Only now I know what happened. Rachel was giving us plain bread for breakfast, and MaryanMartha was saying we'd have to have it all the time, and I—well, I guess I got mad. Anyhow, I said I wished that we could go to a place where there wasn't any bread at all—nothing but candy and pie and cake. And I suppose we're here."

"Oh, goody!" and Jean jumped up and clapped her hands. "I think that's lovely. Let's start out and look for something, quick. I'm hungry as a bear."

So was Jacky, for they had come away without a bite of breakfast.

"I don't believe we'll have to go very far," he said. "Just look up at this tree."

Jean looked. "How very odd," she said, squinting her eyes at the leaves. "They're all brown, as if it was fall, and yet—why, Jacky Kendall, they're ginger cookies."

"That's it," said Jacky with a grin. "They just are." And in two jiffies he was up the tree and down again, with his hands full of the crisp brown cakes, and his knees covered with bits of bark.

Jean, who was a tidy little soul, started to brush it off with one hand, as she ate with the other, when something in the feel of it made her look closer, then smell, and then touch her small red tongue to the bit left on her finger.

"Jacky," she said in awestricken tones, "Jacky, it's chocolate."

Jacky gasped. Then he ran his own tongue down across the brown patch on his knee. Then a smile crept around the corners of his mouth, and Jacky—Jacky Kendall, so carefully brought up by mother and Cousin Alice and Rachel—Jacky smacked his lips hard, and slowly winked one eye.

Jean gave a little giggle, and in a minute they were both at the tree, pulling off bits of the bark, chewing twigs, and even trying to break off the heavy branches, while with all the pulling and shaking the ginger cooky leaves fell in showers upon the ground. It wasn't

long before they had eaten all they could, and then, hand in hand, they started out across the country.

They had been too much occupied to notice the grass, till they walked upon it. Then it gave a funny little crinkle that made Jacky look down. Next he felt, and then he picked a blade and bit it. "Jean," he said, "it's candied, and it's good."

Sure enough, the grass was all brittle with sugar, and it was as crisp and sweet as could be.

"Why did I eat so much chocolate and so many cookies? groaned Jean, nibbling at the tempting blades.

"Well, don't eat too much of this, or you may be sorry. There's sure to be more good things ahead," warned Jacky, and with a sigh of regret she started on.

But every step brought fresh wonders. "It's like that 'water, water everywhere' poem," said Jacky, "only here it's sugar, sugar everywhere. Why, Jean, the very birds are made of candy. I don't see why they don't fall to pieces when they fly."

"And the stones," said Jean as she stubbed her toe against a pile of rockcandy that lay all pink and glittering in the sun.

"Oh, Jacky, Jacky, why can't we take some home. Not a little bit, you know, but a great, whole lot—enough to fill the little spare room on our floor. No one goes in there. Don't you think we could?"

"Wish good for one day only," said Jacky. "You remember that as well as I do. It is mean, isn't it? Say, Jean, I'm awfully thirsty, aren't you? Let's try to find some water."

"All right," and off they started, going into a little stretch of woods, where they were sure they would find a brook.

It was hard to walk very fast. There were great beds of candied violets, bushes covered with roses, their leaves all temptingly crusted with sugar, and all sorts of fascinating trees, with chocolate barks and leaves of various kinds of cookies. The jumble tree was the funniest, for the little sugar birds had built nests of shining spun sugar in the holes in the middle of the jumbles and from the center of every nest started two or three little heads with big yawning bills, reaching for the sugar worms the father birds were bringing.

Jacky and Jean watched that tree for a long time, but at last got so very thirsty they had to go on.

Pretty soon they saw the gleam of smooth brown water through the trees and started pell-mell. Jacky reached the bank of the little lake first, went flat on his stomach, stuck his eager lips down and then came up as suddenly, with a funny little splutter.

"Jean," he said, "it's not water at all. It's molasses."

Jean, who was just on the point of taking a drink herself, stopped short.

"How mean," she cried. "Molasses is good enough, but not when you're thirsty. What are we going to do? You don't suppose all the water is made out of molasses, do you? Wouldn't that be dreadful?"

Jacky nodded. "Well," he said, "there's no use trying to drink that stuff. I know it would make us thirstier than ever. Let's go on. Maybe we will find a spring."

Somehow it wasn't quite so much fun now. They were very thirsty and they had walked a good way, too. Even the sight of a range of mountains made of fruit cake did not interest them, after they discovered that the snow upon their tops was nothing more nor less than frosting.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Jean, "I want a drink of water. I don't care how much cake there is, I want water."

"How would lemonade do, if you're thirsty?" said a strange, sweet little voice at her elbow. "We don't have such a crude thing as water in this country. In fact, we don't consider it at all healthful. And as for that thick, heavy, white stuff you call milk—it's no good at all, except maybe in the mixing of chocolate caramels."

Jacky and Jean turned and saw beside them a queer little man taller than they, and as thin as a toothpick. His hands and head and feet were bare, and you could see right through them. His clothes were

made out of thin, greased tissue paper, such as caramels are often wrapped in.

"We think water is pretty good," they said, "and we like milk, too. But everyone has a different taste, you know. And we are very fond of lemonade. We'd like some ever so much."

"Come with me," said the little man, and went on before them with a quick little step. Somehow he sounded brittle, and the children feared he might break to bits before their very eyes.

How good that lemonade did taste, to be sure. It was rather sweet, but it was cool, and it was wet, and that was what they wanted. The little man showed them how it was mixed, right in the spring, so that they never had to have any "crude water" at all. Then he took them to his house, and they sat on marshmallow cushions, at peppermint candy tables, and he served them lunch.

It was such a funny lunch. They would have delighted in it if they hadn't had so much sweet stuff already. Cake and pie and candy! That was all there was on the table. The little man explained that every family had a pie growing in the back yard, and they just cut off what they wished for dinner. He spoke of it much as father spoke of the kitchen garden. It was good pie—mince pie. The little man said he grew that kind because it was richer. He said some people might prefer apple, but he couldn't understand why.

Jacky and Jean thought they could understand why. They were hungry, and so were gulping it down, but it was awfully rich. It seemed to stick in their throats.

"Now, said the little man, as they rose from the table, "I want to take you to see Sugar Loaf Mountain. Pure sugar, my dears. The sweetest range of mountains you can find. Plum Cake range? Very fine, no doubt, and the frosting on top is picturesque and useful. But Sugar Loaf Mountain is the best. Come on!"

Jacky and Jean felt about that time that they never wished to see anything sweet again. But they had wished the other wish first and must stick to it.

The little man went on in front of them with his queer, brittle little walk, and they noticed that instead of smelling the flowers he passed he always bent down and took a little taste of them. Somehow it made the children feel rather queer inside.

"I—I wish I had a dose of Rachel's peppermint," said Jean.

"I wish I had some good bread and butter," said Jacky boldly, and they almost thought they heard the Mysterious Sparrow giggle, when suddenly the little man before them gave a great shiver and a thin little squeal. "Oh, dear, oh dear!" he cried. "Don't you know any better than to mention that awful stuff in this country? You can't stay here at all if you even think of—you know what. B. and

B.—that awful B. and B. Now you've got to go and I haven't shown you anything at all. Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, de—" Just there his voice went off into a far-away little squeak, for the children were flying through the air and the country of cake and candy and pie was vanishing below them.

They landed on the floor of the nursery with a bump at least two hours before sunset.

"But I don't care," cried Jacky, making a rush for the pantry. "MaryanMartha, I want a great big slice of bread and butter—quick!"

"I thought you'd come around and be good," said MaryanMartha, and smiled as she spread the butter on a thick slice of bread.

CHAPTER XIV

The Sparrow Entertains

"I CAN'T think of a thing to wish, and it's my turn," sighed Jean. She held the cage in her hands and looked down at its battered bars as though they could give her an inspiration.

"I'll tell you what—" began Jacky, but Jean stopped him.

"No you won't either; I don't want to be told. I want to think of something all by myself. I know." And she rubbed the cage hard as Jacky asked eagerly, "What is it?"

"Never you mind. Wait and see." Jean looked very important.

The Mysterious Sparrow winked at Jacky as he lighted on the windowsill.

"We all like our little secrets," he said gayly, "but this time Jean

will have to tell if she wants any good from it herself—won't she, Jacky, my lad?"

Jacky nodded, and Jean smiled.

"But there isn't anything to tell," she said. "I haven't thought of a thing. But I'm going to wish just the same. I'm going to wish for you to think of something particularly nice for us to do."

"Goodness gracious sakes alive!" cried the Mysterious Sparrow. "You certainly are the strangest child! What a wish, to be sure! What do you think I'm going to do about it?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," said Jean. "I think you'll give us a good time, whatever you do. I'm sure if you're any kind of a fairy at all, you ought to think of something particularly nice."

The Mysterious Sparrow gave a funny little chirp. "Really," he said, "you've come on surprisingly—surprisingly. I really believe that you believe in me as fully as Jacky does. I've made a convert of you, and I think you do deserve a treat. Now, then—how would you like to come home with me?"

Jacky and Jean fairly gasped with delight.

"Oh yes, yes, yes!" they cried, and the Mysterious Sparrow chuckled. "I thought that would suit," he said. "Well, then, come along. Ah, here we are, right side up with care." And the children sat staring about them.

They didn't know quite, what they did expect to see, but it was different from their ideas of a fairy home. It wasn't snug in the heart of a rose, where one fairy-book had led them to think all fairies lived. It wasn't a beautiful cave, hung with wonderful tapestries. It wasn't made of glass, or of gold, or of anything unusual. Neither was the Mysterious Sparrow as they had expected to see him.

In fact, they were sitting in a large, handsomely-furnished room, with windows that looked out over an exceptionally fine garden, and before them stood a very elegant young man of the usual proportions, who was smiling and bowing at them in the friendliest manner. They knew it was the Mysterious Sparrow by his voice.

"Well," he said, "how do you like it?"

"Oh," said Jean, doubtfully, "it's very nice, of course, very nice indeed. But what are you, anyway? And what is this house?"

"This," said the Mysterious Sparrow, "this is not a house at all. It is a palace, and I am a fairy prince."

Jean's eyes grew big and round. "How perfectly lovely!" she gasped. But Jacky thought otherwise.

"It's awfully pretty around here," he said. "But then, you know, I thought I was going to see the things you read about—fairies with wings, the little ones, you know, small enough to take up in your hand, and giants, big enough to take you up, and dragons and griffins,

and gnomes and brownies—I did so want to see some brownies!"

The Mysterious Sparrow, or rather the Fairy Prince, as he was really, patted Jacky's head.

"That's all right, old chap," he said comfortingly. "I know how you feel about it, exactly. And if you'll just give me time, I'll show you the whole thing. It's here, you know—all the things you've mentioned, and a few more besides. Only I wanted you to see my house first. But we'll start on a tour of inspection right away. Come out and take a walk in the garden, while I have the carriage brought round." He touched a painted lily on the wall. Instantly a great, fierce-looking man, in a long white robe and a big turban, appeared.

"The carriage, Selim," said the Fairy Prince. The man put both slender dark hands across his breast, bowed and disappeared. He hadn't come in at the door, he hadn't been in the room before. He simply came out of the air, and the children felt the most delicious little creepiness running up and down their backs. This, indeed, looked like fairy land!

"That," said the Prince, airily, "that was one of the genii—the kind they have in the Arabian Nights, you know. A very useful sort of people they are, but apt to be unruly once in a while. I have to watch them all the time. Come, now," and he led them out through a long hall, filled with pictures and rugs, into the garden.

The house, or rather the palace, hadn't seemed strange—only exceptionally handsome. But the garden! At first sight it was usual enough, but it wasn't. The first thing they ran into was a gnome—a funny, crooked little chap, with a long, pointed beard, which he had tied in a bow knot under his chin to keep it from getting under his spade as he dug around the roots of a rose bush.

He saluted the Prince in true military style, and then to the children's surprise, the rose bush bowed, too, and the rose petals opened just like a mouth, and a sweet, airy little voice said, "Really, my dear Prince, I wish you would speak to the gnome about me. He doesn't dig at my roots half enough. The earth rests so heavily on them they're quite cramped, I assure you."

The gnome looked rather sheepish, and pulled at his beard till it came untied and fell down on top of the rose, who was nearly smothered, and scolded about it, calling him clumsy and begging to be moved to another part of the garden.

The prince fixed things up between them, and the children went on down the paths, talking to the flowers and the butterflies and birds, who were all as friendly as could be, and told them the prettiest little stories, all about the things they saw and what they were doing. They chatted along with them, till the Prince said, "Well, now, come

Instantly a great, fierce-looking man in a long white robe and big turban appeared.

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along, or you'll miss a part Jacky is particularly interested in. Just outside here we keep the fairy folks they use in stories."

"Oh!" and both the children clapped their hands. "Let's hurry!" and they started running so fast down the path that the Prince had to make his long legs hurry to keep up with them.

Just outside, the country was very different from the garden. It seemed to be in two parts—a kind of misfit sort of country, whose halves did not match. One side was very, very big. There were enormous trees, and a two-story house as tall as the twenty-story office building where father had his office. The grass was like a forest, and the gravel walks seemed to the children to be made up of great rocks.

On the other side everything was very small. Tiny trees that looked like toys hung over the dearest, prettiest little cottages, and the flowers were so small and the roads so narrow that one could hardly see them at all.

"You see," said the Prince, "we have to make the countries to fit the people. We have it big for the giants, and little for the fairies. You'd better let me fix you up a bit before you go visiting. You'd be lost in one place, and would tramp up the other so the fairies couldn't live in it till they had made it all over."

"Oh, my," cried Jean, all in a flutter of excitement. "Are you going to change us, make us big, and little, and all that?" "I certainly

am," said the Prince, laughing. "Here you go—presto, change!"

The children felt the most peculiar sensations. They seemed to be shooting up and up. Jacky actually dodged, he was afraid he would hit the sky. Then suddenly they stopped, and felt quite as usual. But there was a difference. They were in the land of the giants, and everything seemed more natural than it had from a distance. They could appreciate how big everything was, without getting stepped on themselves.

But somehow they didn't find the giants nearly as interesting as they had expected. They seemed big and clumsy, and they didn't want to do anything but sleep and snored so loudly that Jean shut her ears tight and Jacky frowned.

"I think," said Jean, "in fact, I'm very sure, that I'd like to be a fairy now."

"So would I," said Jacky, and instanter they felt themselves pulled all together, and they stepped over into fairyland.

There it was pleasant. The fairy folk crowded all about them. Some swung from the vines, some crept out of the flowers, some hovered in the air above them, and some came close and let the children touch their pretty wings, and look at their strange, dainty garments. Then they made a hammock out of a spider web, and putting the children in it, took them sailing up and up through the air, and then

swooped lightly down again, laughing as Jean looked a little frightened, and grasped the sides of the slender hammock tightly. They took them over into Brownieland, and introduced them to all the queer, round-bodied little chaps; they took them down beneath the earth, where the gnomes lived, and showed them the jolly little wood elves, who were deep in the forest.

They had dinner from a mushroom table, set with roseleaf doilies, and bluebells for cups. They heard about all the fairy stories that ever were written and in just what stories different fairies about them had appeared.

"For that's our work, you know," the little people told them, "getting into all the fairy stories we can. Fairy stories are good for children.

"But where is the Mys——the Prince, I mean?" asked Jacky.

"Here—and waiting to take you on a bit," said the Prince, appearing beside them. "I know you're having a fine time, but just come where the story-book people live—you'll like that."

And in the next minute they were standing in still another place, and the carriage was there, drawn by six white horses, and they were driven off down the road that led between the giants and the fairies, to another country, where they were met by Simple Simon, carrying his

pail with him, and Tommy Tucker, who would persist in singing for his supper every moment they were there.

They saw everyone. The cow jumped over the moon for their benefit, Little Lord Fauntleroy came out and showed them his sash and his curls, the Little Women, all four, took them for a walk, finally handing them over to Sinbad the Sailor, who gave them diamonds as big as their fists and told them marvelous stories.

They had supper with old Mother Hubbard, who found things to eat somewhere or other, though her dog sat outside howling for a bone, and Jack and Jill had just promised to fall down hill for their pleasure, while Jean fixed the vinegar and brown paper with which Jill was to "plaster his nob," when suddenly both the happy visitors were caught up as though by a whirlwind. They gasped, held tight to each other, and landed on the nursery floor.

"I'm sorry," said a voice, "but I forgot how very late it was. Hope you had a nice day!" and there was a whirr of departing wings through the darkened window.

CHAPTER XV

Goodby to the Sparrow

"WELL, we did have a fine time yesterday!" And Jacky drew a long, deep breath of satisfaction.

"Didn't we!" answered Jean.

It was the morning after their trip to the home of the Mysterious Sparrow, and they still lay in their white bed, waiting for Rachel to call them. They wouldn't have stirred till she came—they never did. It was such fun to have her make bread out of them in order to wake them up, as she always did. Rachel said they were getting to be pretty big loaves now, but still they made her go through the kneading and working, and the "tossing into the oven to bake," just as they had when they were babies.

They didn't have long to wait this morning before she came in,

and it seemed to the children that she was very much inclined to make them hurry through everything at a very uncomfortable rate of speed. They didn't like it, and said so, but Rachel only laughed, and MaryanMartha, who had come up with their breakfast fully ten minutes ahead of time, laughed, too. But the children didn't much mind. Rachel and MaryanMartha went away and left them to eat their breakfast alone, so that Jacky got all the sugar he wanted on his oatmeal, and Jean put butter on her bread in enormous chunks, while they discussed the wish for the day.

"It's really puzzling—very puzzling," said Jacky, "because you see we've had so many wishes now, and the last one was so awfully good anything would seem tame beside it."

"That's just what I think," said Jean, with her mouth full. "Oh, Jacky, what lots of fun we have had! And to think that I didn't use to like fairy stories, or to believe in fairies, or anything. It's a wonder that the Mysterious Sparrow was nice to me at all."

"Yes," said Jacky quite frankly, "it is. Now, if he'd done nice things for me——"

"Oh, pooh, don't get conceited! It's your wish today, though, so hurry up and think what you're going to ask for. I don't wonder you're stumped."

"Slang! Five cents to the plaster pig!" and Jacky danced with

glee as he collected the money, though Jean claimed the privilege of dropping it through the hole in the broad, spotted back.

Then they went in and drew the cage from the window seat. "We've rubbed it 'most bright, haven't we?" said Jean, as she held it carefully between her thumb and forefinger. "It looks almost nice now—and how shocked Cousin Alice was when she saw it all dirty! Oh, haven't we had fun with Cousin Alice! I just wish we could tell mother about it so she'd understand, don't you? My, Jacky, I rubbed it again!"

"Then you've got that wish, and it's no fair, because it was my turn," cried Jacky, with flushed cheeks. "Please, Mr. Sparrow, or Mr. Prince, or whatever you are, don't let that be a wish. It wasn't fair."

"I'm afraid I can't help that," said the Sparrow, as he flew in at the window and lit on the top of the cage. "She wished it, you know, and as far as my part goes, these turns don't count. Jean shall have her wish. But children, there's a more serious side to it than you imagine."

"What?" asked both together.

"You have wished," went on the Mysterious Sparrow solemnly, "you have wished that you might tell a grown person all about me, and about the wishes I have given you, and that she should under-

stand and believe the story. I can grant your wish, and I will—but you can never have any more."

Jacky and Jean stared at him a moment in utter horror, and then Jean began to cry softly, while Jacky sniffed in a very suspicious manner as he demanded shortly, "Why?"

"Because, after she knows, the spell is broken," said the Sparrow. "Fairies are for children only, you must remember. When grown-ups know and understand, we must fly away. They have had their turn."

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear, oh dear," wailed Jean, while Jacky's mouth twitched. "But we'll be so very lonesome," he said, "it was bad enough before, with mother away, but now—and there won't be a chance to tell her for so long—"

"Tell her what? You can tell her anything and everything right now," cried a gay, happy voice. And there stood mother, right beside them, with her arms out, and her eyes shining with smiles and tears. "Oh, my babies, my babies. I'm so glad to have you back again! You must tell me just everything you've done! The letters weren't near enough," and she kissed them over and over, while they clung to her till father laughed and said they'd wear her down as thin as she was when she went away.

"You go down stairs," said mother, shaking her fingers at him.

" I'm afraid I can't help that," said the Sparrow as he flew in at the window.

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"You've had them all the time, and you've seen me often. They haven't. You go away, and leave us all alone." And father laughed and went.

Then they began. At first it was all so strange and mixed that mother wrinkled her pretty forehead up into a hundred perplexed little lines. But finally she made them talk one at a time, and so began to get the story.

Her soft eyes opened very wide, but she had believed in fairies when she was small just as Jacky always did, and it did not seem so strange to her as it might to a great many mothers.

When they went to look for the cage to show her that, however, it was gone.

"Why," cried Jacky, "it was here just a minute ago!"

"I threw it down when mother came," said Jean. But the cage had vanished.

"Too bad!" said mother, beginning to look a little doubtful, when she jumped nearly out of her chair. For a voice had addressed her from the window sill—and the window was in the third story of the house.

"My goodness!" she cried, "what's that?"

"It's the Mysterious Sparrow," cried the children.

And sure enough, there he stood, bobbing his small head at them.

"I am glad to meet you, madam," he was saying in a very pompous manner, "and glad to know that you do not look upon me as a humbug. I have tried to make your children happy and," forgetting his grand manners, "and I've had a good time, too! I only wish you could have come along on a wish yourself, but you see, according to rules, I must take the cage with me. It's just outside. I'll travel in it. Goodby!" and before they could speak again they saw him jump into the cage, close the little door with his beak and climb to the perch, and then the cage sailed off through the air as easily and gracefully as a small canoe would float upon a river.

"Goodby, goodby, goodby!" cried Jacky and Jean. And mother, too, waved her pretty handkerchief and called goodby after the Sparrow, as long as they could see the least glint of the sunshine on the bars of the cage. Then they all leaned back in the window seat and looked at each other.

"Well," said Jean softly, "there's another fairy story ended."

And they were all very still till father came up to take them down to lunch, when they brightened up again. The Mysterious Sparrow was gone, but then—mother was at home.

THE END.

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